

Sport



Spain's Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario (R) smiles while holding her trophy after beating world number two Steffi Graf of Germany 6-3, 6-3 in the final of the Hamburg Open tennis tournament on Sunday. Graf failed to become the first player to win a tournament seven times in a row.

—AFP photo

Sanchez shatters Graf's dream

HAMBURG, Germany, May 3: Steffi Graf failed to become the first player to win a tournament seven consecutive times when she was beaten in straight sets by Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in Sunday's final of the Hamburg Open here, reports AFP.

Graf, the number two seed and defending champion, carried over her indifferent form from the semifinals and rarely offered the third seeded Spaniard a real challenge.

She held serve just once in the first set, in the seventh game, but even then had to hold off two break points.

In the 2nd set Graf broke serve to lead 1-0, but Sanchez-Vicario hit back with a backhand volley at the net to level for 1-1, and she took another

vital break to lead 5-3 when Graf put a smash into the net. While Graf was listless, Sanchez-Vicario pressured by repeatedly coming to the net on the short ball and volleying away a winner. She covered the angles there very well, as Graf sought in vain to find a way to tame her.

While Graf strove to find any rhythm or ways to place Sanchez under pressure, the Spaniard was aggressive, put more pace on the ball and made less unforced errors.

"I've been working on my attacking game and on taking more risks, and I was very happy with the way I played," she said.

Graf was very disappointed to finish the week so poorly and admitted that her game just wasn't there when she needed it.

"I didn't feel very confident with my forehand and all together I didn't know how to win a point. I had trouble putting the ball in play," she confessed.

"But she played well, she rarely made mistakes and concentrated well. She played very few bad games."

Seles, stabbed on court on Friday, was sleeping, but her brother Zoltan assured her that Seles now feels much better.

Seles had been out since the end of February with a viral infection and another break could further undermine her match fitness and cost her the world number one spot.

The stabbing cast a huge shadow over the tournament and is likely to lead to a sec-

ond set. Graf demonstrated her determination to carry on as normal by refusing to accept a guard sitting on court behind her chair during Sunday's final.

In order not to penalise Seles unfairly for the incident, the Women's Tennis Association decided to award Seles the same number of points for the tournament as she won in the corresponding week last year, when she lost in the final of the Italian Open.

The exceptional decision means her tour computer ranking, which is based on average points over the last year, is unchanged.

In Waregem, Belgium, Brian Tobin, the British president of the International Tennis Federation, said he had been deeply shocked by the incident.

"All around the world, we already had some security measures in place to conduct players from the cloakroom to the court and around the court itself."

"But we've never had to do anything about the players on the court. The one thing I would hate to do is to have to build gratings around each tennis court like for soccer matches."

"Nationalistic enthusiasm surrounding Davis Cup matches had given tennis its only serious security problem up until now," he said.

"Two or three times in recent years in South America, players have been intimidated and threatened," he said. "This year, we had places where safety has been strengthened. But I hope that it will not be a regular problem."

Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, who beat Graf in straight sets in Sunday's final of the event, visited Seles in the morning. Seles was sleeping at the time but her brother Zoltan assured Sanchez that she was feeling much better.

When Graf visited on Saturday, she reported that Seles was severely depressed by the incident.

The world number one is not expected to play for at least a month and is unlikely to defend her title at the French Open, which begins on May 24.

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