

Indonesian Swandi makes a forehand return against Filipino Roland So during their tennis men's singles final in the 17th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Singapore yesterday. Swandi won the gold. — AFP photo

McNeil magic shocks Sabatini

EASTBOURNE, England, June 18: Gabriela Sabatini's build-up to next week's Wimbledon tennis championships was ruined by American Lori McNeil in the third round of the Eastbourne Cup on Thursday, reports AFP. The second seed from Argentina slumped 7-6, 6-1 in 85 minutes to the defending champion, who underlined once again why she will be one of the most feared floaters at Wimbledon. The ninth-seeded McNeil, winner of the Edgbaston title last week, said: "It was very windy, but I just played my game, made my volleys and made her play every single point." In so doing Sabatini provided more evidence that she is a shadow of the player who ran German Steffi Graf so close in the 1991 Wimbledon final. Sabatini, who has not won a tournament for more than a year, said of McNeil: "She's

very good. She puts a lot of pressure on and comes to the net. That is why she is so tough on grass."



GABRIELA SABATINI Sabatini led 6-5 and 30-0 on McNeil's serve in the first set, but could not press home her advantage even after leading 3-1 in the tiebreak, which

she eventually lost 7-5 to the world number 19. "I had a chance in that first set, but she served very well," she said. "I didn't return well and I didn't try enough." Top seed Martina Navratilova reached the semi-finals, but only after playing two vastly contrasting matches in one day as tournament officials sought to make up for Wednesday's washout. She took nearly two hours to dispose of Canadian Patricia Hy in round three, losing her serve eight times and being passed constantly before emerging an unconvincing 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 winner. However, the 10-time champion then overwhelmed fellow American Gigi Fernandez, the 16th seed, 6-1, 6-3 in the quarter-finals. "This is the only place I play two matches in one day, but I feel OK," said the 36-year-old left-hander. "The wind was a nightmare, you cannot enjoy a day like that, but you get through it."

Navratilova urges Becker, "Don't quit"

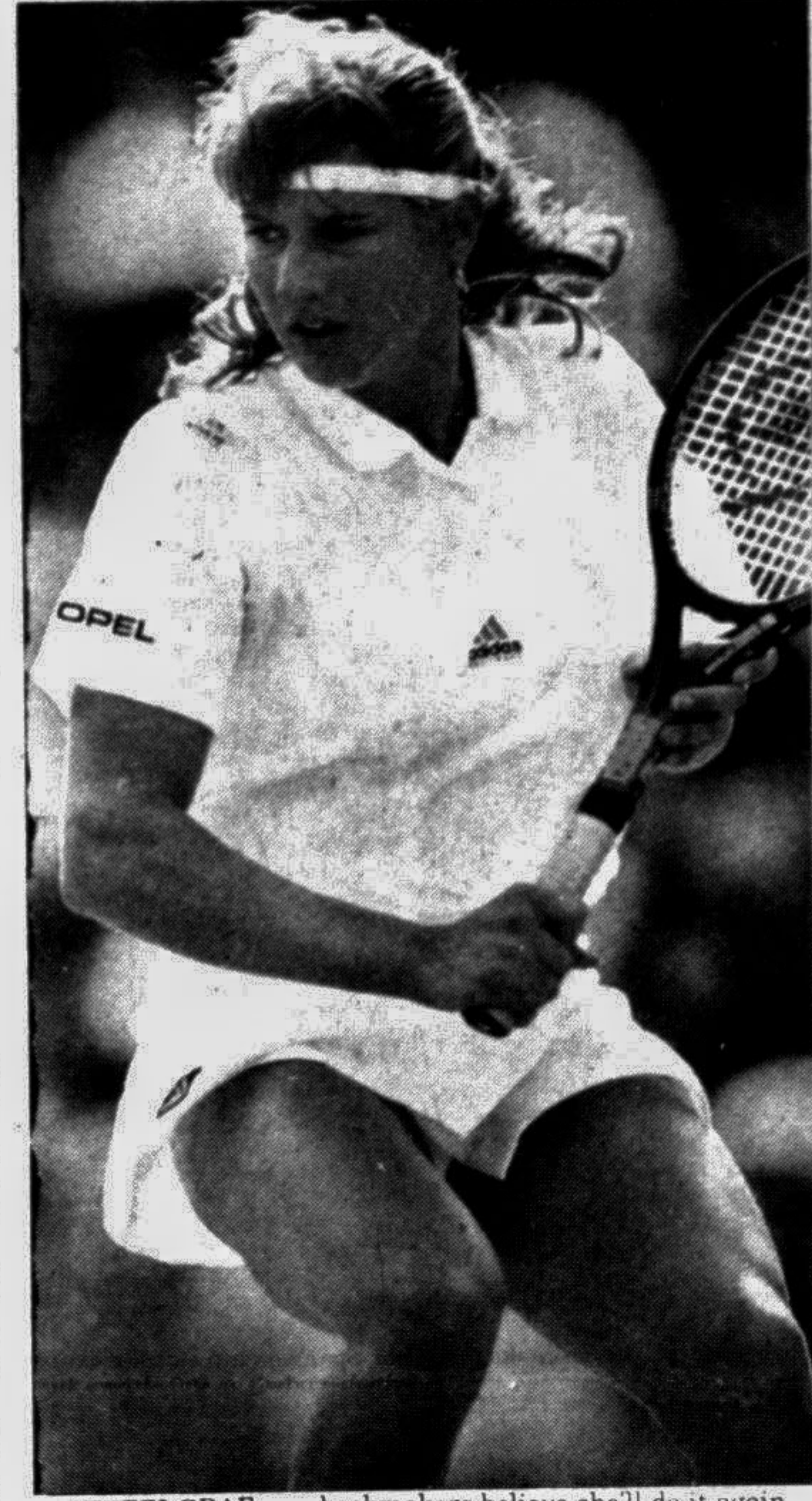
EASTBOURNE, England, June 18: Triple Wimbledon champion Boris Becker, who is considering taking a break from tennis, was urged on Friday by American veteran Martina Navratilova to continue playing, reports AFP. The German has talked about the possibility of following three other former world number ones — Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe and Mats Wilander — in giving up tennis for a couple of years and then making a comeback. But the 36-year-old Navratilova warned: "These days it's hard to come back on the tour when you take four or five months off. I'd say to him it's too early to quit." "You can't get those years back. I mean, hopefully, he has 50 years ahead of him or more. Why not give it three or four great years and then think about quitting?" "When those thoughts about quitting get into your head they're very distracting. Then again, he may have a great life and not miss tennis. "But he should think hard about why he is playing now and that would make his decision easy. "I believe Borg has regrets. If you asked Borg now if he would do things differently, I would be surprised if he said 'No, I wouldn't.' You can't get those years back."

Graf billed hot favourite

WIMBLEDON, June 18: Steffi Graf is the hot favourite to wrap up a fifth Wimbledon singles title in six years despite recent doubts over her fitness and the traditional uncertainties of a two-week grass tournament, reports Reuter. British bookmakers have installed the remarkable German as a 4-7 favourite to retain her crown in the 100th women's championship starting next week. Graf's nearest challenger is Gabriela Sabatini of Argentina on 11-2, followed by nine times champion Martina Navratilova who is quoted at an unimpressive 7-1. In the absence of Graf's long-time rival Monica Seles, the rest of the field is scarcely in sight. Only a week ago Graf seemed in danger of missing the big event after injuring her foot while winning the French Open in Paris. Her doctor Helmut Krahl eventually diagnosed a membrane inflammation in her foot, rather than the stress fracture initially feared, but that discomfort is almost the only thing to encourage her opponents. When fit and healthy, Graf has a phenomenal record at Wimbledon. She has lost only one match in five years to Zina Garrison in the 1990 semi-finals, a defeat which occurred only a few months after she broke her right thumb on the ski slopes. Last year, even when Seles was still around, Graf swamped her 6-2, 6-1 in a rain-punctuated final, the Yugoslav's only Grand Slam defeat of the year. In April, however, the horrific knife attack on Seles in Hamburg ruled out any chance of a rematch, propelling Graf back to the top of the world rankings in Paris as a consequence but leaving a shadow hanging over the women's game. Graf, initially more shocked than anyone at the news the Seles aggressor was on her fans, has recovered quicker than many expected. Winning the French Open, staving off a brave challenge from Mary Joe Fernandez in the final, was an important psychological hurdle and she is now in a position to reap the dividends. With 73 titles, 12 Grand Slam crowns and almost 11 million dollars in prize-money already, she knows what it takes to win. More pointedly, the list of her potential challengers is receding rather than growing. Sabatini still flatters to deceive, although her service has been bolstered by new coach Dennis Ralston. Fernandez and

Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario have no great grass pretensions and even Navratilova is no longer invincible. The 36-year-old American lost to lowly-ranked Australian Kristine Radford on grass in Birmingham last week, an unthinkable occurrence even a year ago, and may find a 10th title beyond her even in Seles' absence. All signs, then, seem to point to Graf, 24 last Tuesday, who still insists she will not continue playing as long as Navratilova. "I don't want to be an old champion," she said recently. "Hanging on to the past, losing matches with people unable to remember what I achieved when I was young. That would be awful. I aim to have finished with the sport long before I'm 30."

Even allowing for the stresses of modern-day stardom, Graf might still reflect this weekend she is in the right place at the right time. Back in 1884, the first Women's champion was a 21-year-old Vicar's daughter called Maud Watson who beat her sister Lillian in the final. The field numbered a modest 13, and the event was not allowed to be played until the men's singles had finished. In 1993, the successful woman will receive 275,000 pounds (417,000 dollars) for her efforts, 35,000 pounds (53,000 dollars) more than 1992. Maud Watson, described as "clever, gentle, kind and always a gentlewoman" would scarcely recognise the game she played for fun.



STEFFI GRAF... bookmakers believe she'll do it again

China accuses US for 'wanton interference'

BEIJING, June 18: China accused the US House of Representatives Human Rights Subcommittee Friday of 'wanton interference' for opposing Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics, saying it had done so out of political prejudice, reports AFP. The opposition of the subcommittee and of international organisations to Beijing's Olympic bid "on the pretext of the so-called human rights issue is a wanton interference with the just rights of the Chinese people and tramples upon Olympic principles," said a Chinese Olympic Committee spokesman. The spokesman said China had always respected human rights and that "it is completely unjustified for a US House of Foreign Affairs Subcommittee to oppose the holding of the Olympic Games in the year 2000 in the People's Republic of China out of the political prejudice against China. "Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on the grounds of race, religion, politics, sex or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic movement," the official Xinhua news agency quoted him as saying. The choice of host city, the spokesman said, was a matter solely for the International Olympic Committee (IOC), saying the subcommittee's interference showed "contempt for the Olympic principles." "Citing a wide range of alleged human rights violations in China, the subcommittee passed a resolution June 10 saying that to select Beijing would 'shift the focus from the high ideal values of the Olympic tradition.' The resolution said China had all but admitted it would suppress any dissent to its efforts to host the games by pledging in its application that 'neither now nor in the future will there emerge in Beijing organisations opposing Beijing's bid.' The IOC should 'find another more suitable venue for the Games,' it said. Beijing and Sydney are currently seen as leading the pack of six cities vying to host the 2000 Games. The IOC will decide on the venue in September.

Male genes in female athletes

LONDON, June 18: Five women athletes at last year's Barcelona Olympics had male genes, researchers said today, reports Reuter. Spanish scientists reported in Britain's Lancet medical journal that a new technique used at Barcelona involved looking for two gene sequences specific to the chromosome, which identifies genetic males. The study said five of 2,406 female athletes tested positive for both sequenced and were asked to undergo a full medical examination. One refused and four others had abnormalities in body characteristics. But a sports doctor said the tests were pointless. "Just having male genetic material discovered doesn't mean you are a male," said Malcolm Brown, the British athletics team doctor at Barcelona. "In this day and age, there isn't any real possibility of a male athlete masquerading as a female," Brown said. "All this test does is cause upset to young women, who are suddenly left doubting their own sexuality because of a false result. It is a waste of time."

Connors resorts to retrospect

DUBLIN, June 18: At the ripe old age of 40, Jimmy Connors has no regrets about missing Wimbledon and prefers to sit back and enjoy the memories, reports Reuter. In Dublin for a tournament against fellow veterans such as Roscoe Tanner and Vitas Gerulaitis, Connors told reporters on Thursday he thought a big server would win Wimbledon and doubted if injury-plagued Andre Agassi was fit enough to retain his title. The holder of 109 singles titles said: "Everybody knows especially the athletes, that

time and age take a toll on all of us." The twice Wimbledon winner, who is missing this year along with other past title holders Pat Cash and John



JIMMY CONNORS McEnroe, said: "It is better not to play and enjoy the memories. It is better than struggling for two years more and not making it."

Connors, who now plans to play two or three tournaments a year on the main ATP circuit, said: "There is just as much pressure in the over-35s." He said he had no regrets about missing Wimbledon, adding: "I don't say that in a negative way. I have too many other things to do." Asked to pick a likely winner at Wimbledon this year, he said: "You have got to go with the big servers. Agassi hasn't played that much. I don't know if he is any kind of shape to retain his title." Reflecting on how tennis has evolved into a big hitter's game he said "It's harder and harder. At Wimbledon they would rather see an ace than anything else." Vitas Gerulaitis, the winner of 29 Grands Prix, admitted one of the big attractions of coming to Ireland was a chance to play golf as well as tennis against his fellow veterans: "It is nice to beat these guys without running."

Pierce senior banned again

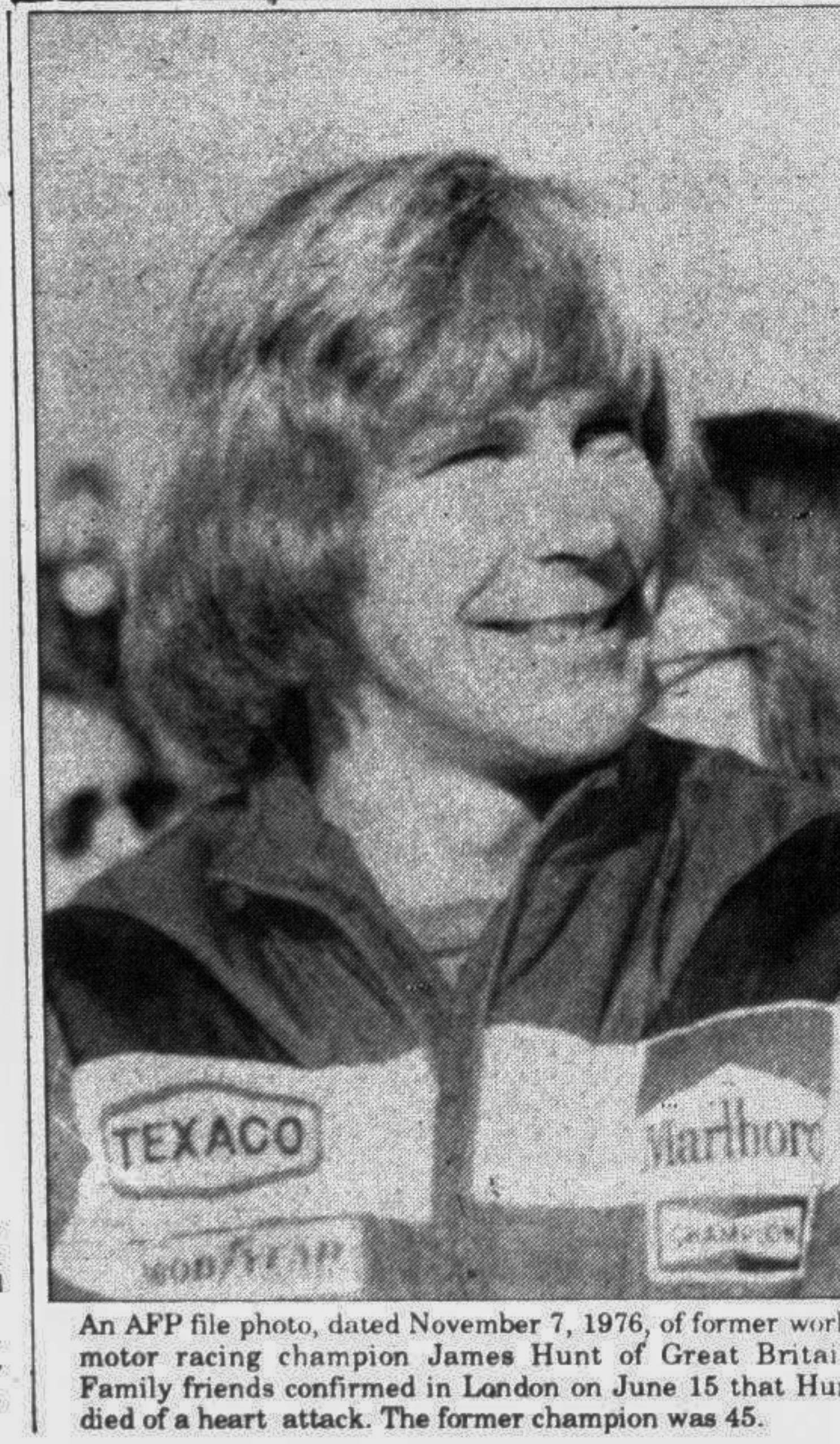
LONDON, June 18: Jim Pierce, the volatile father of world number 14 Mary Pierce, has been banned from watching his daughter play at the Wimbledon tennis championships starting here on Monday, reports AFP. Chris Gorringer, chief executive of the All-England Club, where the championships are held, disclosed on Thursday that the club's committee of management had agreed with the Women's Tennis Council to suspend Pierce senior from the tournament. The WTC voted unanimously on Thursday to sanction the 56-year-old American under the tour rules as a result of his "inappropriate" behaviour at the French Open. Pierce was expelled from the stands in Paris when he became abusive during his 18-year-old daughter's match against American Kimberley Po. Pierce, who has served a jail term for violence, was ejected from the grounds and his credentials gaining admittance to Roland Garros were later removed. The WTC phrased a special rule earlier this year expanding the existing "dishonourable or unprofessional conduct" rule for players to include coaches and relatives.

Rain reigns at Roehampton

LONDON, June 18: The qualifying tournament for the Wimbledon tennis championships may have to be switched to switch venues because of this week's downpours, reports AFP. The qualifiers, currently being hit by rain at Roehampton, may have to be finished at Wimbledon's own covered practice courts. Referee Tony Gathercole was left contemplating a backlog of 154 matches following the abandonment of play on Wednesday, the second washout in three days with Wimbledon starting on Monday. It would be the first time the qualifying event had moved away from Roehampton since it began there in 1947.

Masur elbows out last of Britons

MANCHESTER, England, June 18: Australian tennis ace Wally Masur completed a British hat-trick here on Thursday to coast into the semifinals of the Manchester Open, reports AFP. The 30-year-old Australian followed victories over Ross Matheson and Chris Wilkinson in his two previous matches with the scalp of British number one Jeremy Bates. His 6-4, 6-3 success was not without controversy, however, Bates being upset by a disputed call in the sixth game of the second set, which cost him his last real chance of saving the match. Masur, ranked 77 places above Bates, had won the first set after breaking Bates in the second game, when the Briton served three successive double-faults. The fourth seed then led 3-1 in the second, only for Bates to break back for 3-2. He was a break-point down in the sixth game when Masur hit a backhand down the line, which looked to have landed at least two inches out of court. There was no call and Bates shouted "no way" and appealed against the decision, but the umpire said that he had seen no gap and Masur went to 4-2. "To lose my serve on a call like that is beyond frustration," said Bates. "It was not even particularly close. It was clearly out." Masur said: "I couldn't see whether it was out or not, but I'll take it. We all get good and bad calls." Masur won his last two service games for the loss of only two points to complete his victory in 72 minutes.



An AFP file photo, dated November 7, 1976, of former world motor racing champion James Hunt of Great Britain. Family friends confirmed in London on June 15 that Hunt died of a heart attack. The former champion was 45.

It'll be even harder for Agassi

HALLE, Germany, June 18: Andre Agassi will be suffering double the pressure when he starts the defence of his Wimbledon singles title next week because of his recent injuries, his coach Nick Bolletieri said on Wednesday, reports Reuter. The 23-year-old American, who lost his first competitive match for two months at the Halle grasscourt tournament on Tuesday, has recovered from a wrist injury but is still struggling with elbow pain and is desperately short of match practice as he prepares for the All-England Club. Bolletieri, who discovered Agassi as a teenager, said: "Defending at Wimbledon is a lot

of pressure. If you have anything else it multiplies. Agassi, playing his first serious match since April 9 because of tendinitis in his right wrist, looked sluggish and slow as he was beaten 5-7, 6-2, 6-1 by German Carl-Uwe Steeb, his first and last test before he steps out on the Centre Court next Monday to open Wimbledon. Bolletieri said Agassi has suffered no ill-effects from the match and planned to continue his preparations with a training session with former French Open champion Michael Chang. He is enthusiastic about going to play... he has a little something in the arm. But we were pleased that the wrist allowed him to play. That is a great sign, he said.

Agassi can take heart from the fact that he won Wimbledon last year with no practice on the fast grass surface before he arrived in London. There was no pressure last year. We hit balls for 45 minutes on a hard court in West Palm Beach (Florida) and away I went, Bolletieri said. The court was green and we made to believe it was a grass court... but before he did not hit for just two weeks. It is a little different after an injury, coming back with something on your mind. Agassi has been forced to modify his serve — one of the most important aspects of a player's game on grass — to take pressure off his playing arm.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS: 1 Alencon, e.g. 5 Flushed turkey 12 Unrelenting 13 Overseas pal 14 Golden Rule word 15 Beach stuff 16 Summer cottage 18 Soak up 20 Lord Peter Wimsey's creator 21 Haven for the seasick 23 1974 kidnap org. 24 Wouldn't leave 28 Advantage 31 Food for little lambs 32 Cousteau, e.g. 34 "A mouse!" 35 "Diamonds Are a Girl's Friend" 37 Lot 39 Spotted, field to Tweety access 41 Freeway 42 Kitchen rackful 45 Dominions 49 Bribe of a sort 51 Je ne sais — 52 Stressful type: abbr. 53 Color 54 Condo-minium, e.g. 55 Stagnate 56 Opened the trick 57 Congers DOWN: 1 Singer-Stans 17 Hydro-gen, for one 19 Cry heard in a speak-easy 22 Actor Burton 24 God used this... 25 ...to create her 26 Occult 27 Went ashore 29 Solidify 30 Scratch (out) 33 New York city 36 Stop the balcarrier 38 Not transparent 40 Charlotte's creation 42 Read cursorily 43 Gyro bread 44 Humorist Mort 46 Debussy's "Clair de ..." 47 Drudge 48 Takes a chair 50 Prompt

Cryptic crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-57. The grid is partially filled with letters, and some cells are blacked out.

CRYPTOQUIP
A S Y D D X G K J Q M K Y L
X N U K N D Q J L D L X G G X H R
L J N K U Z N S K N A Y N
Y D S J L H M X N N Z K
Saturday's Cryptoquip: DAD HAS A BURNING DESIRE TO BARBECUE TONIGHT.
Today's Cryptoquip clue: M equals Y
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.