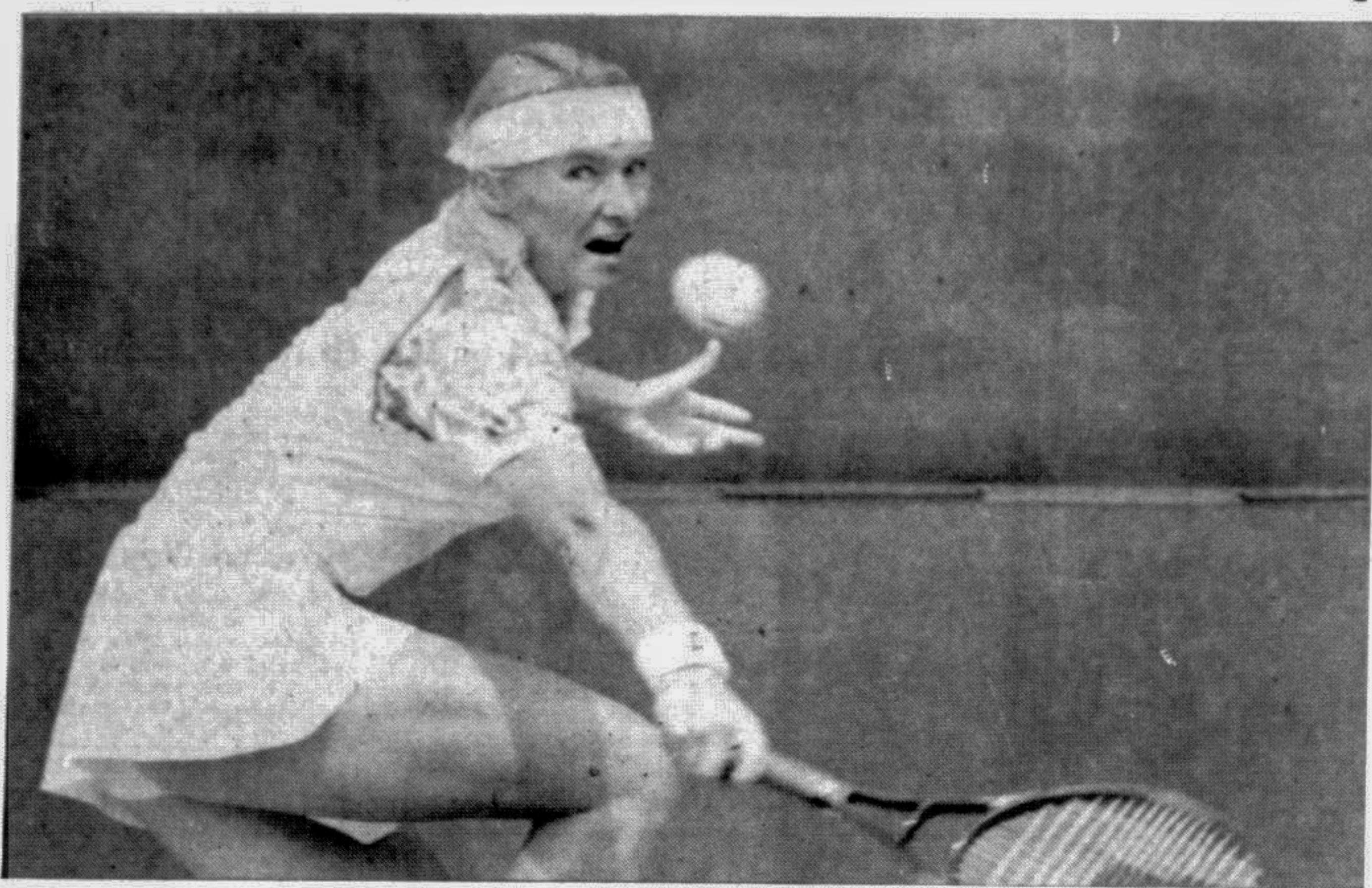


Sport



Wimbledon finalist Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic goes for a backhand return during her first round match in the US Open against Mexico's Angelica Gavalon on Tuesday. Novotna advanced to the next round winning 6-2, 6-4. —AFP photo

Enqvist makes Agassi eat the crow

NEW YORK, Sept 1: All of Andre Agassi's boasts suddenly sounded empty.

He bragged about his new work ethic, his renewed confidence. He thought he'd strut into the US Open without playing many matches and just stroll off with the trophy and the fat check.

Instead, he walked off a loser Tuesday in one round — just like Jennifer Capriati and Michael Stich. Two-time defending champion Stefan Edberg nearly did the same, while No. 1 Jim Courier and No. 2 Pete Sampras breezed ahead, reports AP.

Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, ranked 61, beat Agassi at his own game in a 3 1/2-hour affair, outhitting him from the baseline and making his head spin with 20 aces in a 6-4, 6-4, 6-6, 6-7, (3-7), 6-2 victory.

"I didn't really feel sharp from the first point to the last point," said Agassi, the '86 seed. "And when you are down two sets, it takes a lot of energy out of you to get back into it."

Simmering Seles holds show

NEW YORK, Sept 1: Monica Seles talked almost as long as Steffi Graf and Martina Navratilova played, upstaging them on the first day of the US Open and taking swipes at her peers without lifting a racket, reports AP.

Graf dashed off in a hurry, dinner waiting. She beat Robin White 6-3, 6-0 in 42 minutes Monday and felt ready to play her next match right away. She could have won three matches and still not missed evening appetizers.

Graf covered the court with such speed and ease there wasn't a hint of the swollen bone in her foot, which required ice and anti-inflammatory drugs after she won the French Open and Wimbledon. There's a danger, though, the hard courts in New York could take a toll on her foot toward the end of the two-week tournament.

"I hope it won't come back," she said. "There is nothing that really bothers me right now."

Navratilova left almost as quickly, her exit after a 6-0, 6-1 victory delayed only by a long ovation when Gloria Pizzichini won her solitary game and lifted a weary finger to celebrate.

But this was a day on which few paid attention to the tennis. Barely 500 fans sat in the broiling stadium while Wayne Ferreira knocked off No. 9 seed Petr Korda 7-6 (7-2) 4-6, 7-6 (9-7), 3-6, 6-2. Fewer still saw women's No. 9 Anke Huber beat Karin Kschwendt 6-2, 6-2, or No. 10 Magdalena Maleeva beat Marianne Werdel 7-5, 6-4.

At night, a victory by No. 4 Conchita Martinez over Sandrine Testet, 6-2, 6-3, did little to excite the crowd. The evening programme ended with Paul Haarhuis outlasting David Wheaton 6-7 (7-4), 3-6, 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 victory over Marcos Ondruska. It was the opposite result of two years ago, when McEnroe lost a stirring first-round match against Jimmy Connors after winning the first two sets.

"I was thinking about that," McEnroe said. "But that was then and this is now."

The crowd packed the grandstand for a while to watch men's No. 14 Alexander Volkov beat Jonathan Stark 1-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (9-7), 6-3 in a match that was competitive if not

Agassi should know because he never has come back from two sets down.

Mary Joe Fernandez, the Women's No. 6 seed, withdrew because of abdominal pain. She was replaced by Maria Jose Gaidano of Argentina, a 'lucky loser' from the qualifying tournament, who promptly showed up to beat Andrea Vietra of Brazil, 6-2, 5-7, 6-0.

Agassi complained he had trouble with the swirling winds, trouble with his backhand. Mostly he had trouble with double-faults — three in the final set — and with Enqvist's 125 mph (200-kph) serves.

He seemed as shocked by his upset as the crowd that had cheered so hard for him on stadium court.

"If you win," he said, "you feel like you're on top of the world. If you lose, you feel like I am right now. It will get worse if this guy gets his butt kicked in the next rounds."

Before Enqvist experienced the biggest victory of his life, his compatriot, Edberg, nearly suffered one of his worst losses.

In the heat of the day, Edberg lay sprawled on the court, knocked down at the net by a blistering backhand to his head. He rose slowly, like a boxer at the count of nine. He later claimed the shot hurt him.

And just as slowly, Edberg struggled back, exactly as he

did a year ago to win his second straight Open.

No defending men's champion ever lost in the first round of the US Open, much less a two-time defending champ like Edberg. Yet he barely avoided that dubious distinction, surviving 6-2, 0-6, 7-6 (9-7), 5-7, 6-3 in a 3 1/2-hour drama against 99th-ranked Olivier Delaître of France.

Less fortunate was Capriati, the women's No. 7 seed, drummed out in the first round by Leila Meskhi of Georgia, 1-6, 6-4, 6-4.

"I couldn't believe I could get totally off after the first set when I played great," said Capriati, who punched a forehand long to end an 18-shot rally on the final point. That was Capriati's 61st unforced error, more than double Meskhi's total.

Edberg's last loss at the Open came in the first round in 1990 against Alexander Volkov. Now Edberg seemed as if he might go that way again, playing against a man who knew all about first-round losses. Delaître had a dozen times in the first round of ATP tournaments, and both times in his last two Opens, before switching to the easier Challengers circuit.

On this day, though, Delaître played well enough to take advantage of a flat champion, missing lobs and deep topspin groundstrokes, a crushing backhand and a decent, if not overwhelming, first serve.

Compact and muscular at 5-foot-8 (137-cm), Delaître was a middleweight pummeled a 6-2 (188-cm) tennis heavyweight.

Edberg's legs looked dead,

his serve seemed labored, his volleys erratic. His chipping backhand betrayed him, his forehands had little pace.

Linesmen called him for six foot-faults on first serves. He double-faulted 11 times. On changeovers, he had a ballboy hold a big blue umbrella over him shield the sun.

Charging the net with Delaître hitting a baseline backhand, Edberg got clipped on the back of the head near his left ear in the third game of the second set.

"I am normally pretty quick out there," Edberg said, "but I couldn't handle that one. He can hit ball hard. I mean, really, really hard. It was a good clean shot."

Delaître trailed 4-0 in the third-set tiebreaker, but came back to go ahead 7-6. He missed a chance to take the set when a forehand lob landed long by inches. Edberg didn't waste another opportunity, closing out the tiebreaker 9-7. Delaître refused to go quietly, taking the fourth set to force a showdown.

Open is safe

NEW YORK, Sept 1: The knife attack on Monica Seles during a Hamburg tournament four months ago sent officials at the US Open back to the drawing board to review security measures for the most crowded and unruly of the four Grand Slam events, reports Reuter.

"Obviously, we never discuss specifics on security," said Stephen Devoe, tournament director of the Open. "We reviewed what we've done in the past and frankly determined what we did was good for the fans and the players."

Despite his confidence over the effectiveness of past security, one change was quite obvious on the opening day of the tournament.

Two burly guards jump out from the photographer's pit and stand between the competitors and crowd during changeovers to prevent a repeat of the horrifying scene in Hamburg when a deranged spectator came over the stands and stabbed Seles in the back.

Graf hasn't seen Seles, spoken to her or even set a get-well card since an emotional visit with her in the hospital shortly after the attack.

"It would have been nice of her if (she sent) a letter or something after that, if she could have asked how I'm doing," Seles said.

Most of the other top players sent letters or faxes but kept their distance, as she has from them by isolating herself during recuperation in Vail, Colo.

Seles expressed annoyance with the women for voting not to freeze her No. 1 ranking — if not alone, at least as co-No. 1 with Graf.

"I think for me (the vote) was very hard," Seles said. "Because the person who did this to me stabbed me for that reason, and pretty much he got his wish."

With most of the marquee players off until Tuesday, fans spent more time hobnobbing at the gourmet emporiums and sipping champagne than they did watching the lackluster matches. And behind the scenes, the main buzz was about Seles, who returned to the Open a year after winning it for the second straight time.

Exactly four months had passed since a man obsessed with Graf stabbed Seles in Hamburg, Germany. And the shock of that event and the emotions it brought out in other players have given way to an uncomfortable frostiness.

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Hock stuns Kusuma

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Ong Ewe Hock of Malaysia gave the World Cup men's singles a sensational start here Wednesday by scoring a shock win over fancied Indonesian Allan Budu Kusuma in a preliminary league match, reports AFP.

Playing a superb attacking game, Hock came from behind to upset Kusuma, the world number two, in three games in a Group C match at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium here.

Hock won 4-15, 15-9, 15-4 to set up an interesting race for a semifinal berth from the group which also includes Jens Olson of Sweden and Sompal Kookasemki of Thailand.

Olsson defeated the Thai 15-10, 15-6 in another group match.

The 16 players in the men's singles of the game's premier invitation tournament have been divided into four groups with the leaders qualifying for the semifinals.

The Indonesians took revenge for Kusuma's defeat when world champion Joko Suprianto toyed with Malaysia's Pang Chen 15-6, 15-5 in a Group A match.

A third Indonesian, Herawan Susanto, outclassed England's Anders Nielsen 15-1, 15-10 in Group D to keep their country's hopes alive of winning three titles in the five-event competition.

In other men's singles matches on the opening day, veteran Rashid Sidek of Malaysia downed Darren Hall of England and China's Wo Wenkei defeated Indian wildcard entry Gopi Chand in straight games.

In women's singles, world number two Ya Zhaoying was given a tough fight by unfancied Indian Manjusha Pawangkar before winning a Group D match 11-3, 6-11, 11-2.

Top seeded Susi Susanti of Indonesia begins her campaign Thursday against Joanne Muggridge of England, who lost in straight games to Sweden's Christine Magnusson.

Hot favourites Bev Mainaky and Ricky Subagia completed a mixed day for the Indonesians with an easy win over Thai pair Sakrapruek Thongsari and Pramote Teerawiwatana in the men's doubles.

The only thing the two men have in common is mutual dislike and an overpowering will to win.

"People have this idea that to be a great chess player you have to be weird, but I don't believe this. It's good to have your head screwed on," says Short.

The angular Briton with the John Lennon, the spectacles does not mind his words when it comes to Kasparov, whom he

Battle of 'David' and 'Goliath'

LONDON, Sept 1: Spiky-haired, unassuming Briton Nigel Short meets flamboyant millionaire Garry Kasparov of Russia next week to battle for the highest prize in world chess, reports Reuter.

The 24-game World Championship, which begins on September 7 and will be played in a luxury London theatre over two months, is billed as the clash of the titans.

But it looks more like the struggle between David and

Goliath, so different are the two players.

Short, the first Englishman this century to challenge for the world title and only the third non-Russian to do so since 1927, is a mild-mannered 28-year-old whose only idiosyncrasy appears to be a passion for playing punk rock guitar.

Kasparov, 30, world champion since 1985, sports a gold Rolex watch, Savile row suits and an aggressive style which has made him the most unpopular man in the game.

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Street named for Fredericks

WINDHOEK, Namibia, Sept 1: Fresh from his victory in Stuttgart, Frankie Fredericks up on Namibia's President this week when he returned home and had a street named after him, reports AP.

Fredericks, 25, the world 200 metre champion was met at Windhoek Airport by three cabinet ministers, his mother, Riekie, and a cheering crowd of fans.

He was hardly back in the country a day when he was received by Windhoek Mayor Mattheus Skilongo who named a street after him.

The tree-lined Frankie Fredericks Street runs several kilometres through Windhoek's new luxury suburb of Olympia.

Such an honour has not even been afforded President Sam Nujoma who invited Fredericks for a meeting after the ceremony.

Namibia takes its sports heroes seriously. But Fredericks has done a lot of leg work to put the southwestern African country on the map.

On August 20, he ran the fastest 200 metres at the World Athletics Championships in Stuttgart, Germany. He also

came away with a silver medal in the 400 metres.

A high school track star at Concordia in Windhoek, Fredericks

has beaten in only four out of 20 games.

He once called the brooding Azeri, who now plays for Russia, a 'Baboon' for his habit of openly deriding his opponent's moves and acting to the audience during tournaments.

Kasparov can't deal with human beings at all. He has no normal relationships. It's master-slave, that's all he can understand. He behaves on purpose," Short added.

Kasparov has contemptuously dismissed the pretender to his throne, saying the champion would be like the Briton — Short.

"Let Nigel have his best six months — his chess honeymoon. It will be all over by the end of this fall. Enjoy yourself Nigel while it lasts," Kasparov said earlier this year.

Short, born in a northern English coal-mining town, hit the lime-light when he defeated Soviet Grandmaster Victor Korchnoi in a simultaneous exhibition at the age of 10 and two years later beat 10 time British champion Jonathan Penrose.

In Iceland last year, he was voted the second most popular personality after American pop star Madonna, although most Britons would be hard-pressed to even identify him.