

Germany in Hopman Cup semis

PERTH, Jan 4: Unheralded Bernd Karbacher and Anke Huber scored upset singles victories Tuesday night, giving defending champion Germany a shock quarterfinal victory over the United States in the Hopman Cup team tennis championship, reports AP.

Huber downed French Open finalist Mary Joe Fernandez 6-2, 7-6 (7-4) and Karbacher then stunned veteran Ivan Lendl, who was making his debut on an American team, 6-3, 6-1.

Karbacher and Huber replaced Michael Stich and Steffi Graf on this year's German team and the unseeded pair completely outplayed their second-seeded rivals.

Huber practiced for three hours during the day with close friend Andrei Medvedev and had an edge in power and accuracy over Fernandez in their baseline rallies.

Huber's victory over the No. 5 took just 71 minutes.

"If you practice with the male players, it gives you an advantage because the men hit the ball faster than the women," the 19-year-old Huber said.

Karbacher, a 25-year-old from Munich who is eight years the Czech born Lendl's junior, took plenty of risks against the veteran former US Open champion, but was rewarded.

Under pressure from Karpacher's deep forehands and fierce double-handed backhand, Lendl made almost twice as many unforced errors.

"I always thought I had a chance to beat him but I was surprised everything went so well," said Karpacher.

"You have to go flat out when you play a top player so I tried to dictate the pace and dominate the game. If I do that, I believe that I can beat just about any player."

In desperation, Lendl tried to serve-and-volley, but even that tactic failed against an opponent who was as accurate as he was composed.

Karpacher, who is ranked 54th to Lendl's 19th, won the last five games, clinching victory with a ripping forehand. Lendl, who may be playing his last season after winning 94 singles titles, looked a forlorn figure by the end.

Germany now ill face Austria on Thursday in a semifinal between unseeded nations.

Petr Korda earlier scored an impressive pair of back-to-back victories, leading the top-seeded

Czech Republic to a 2-1 quarterfinal victory over Switzerland and a meeting with Australia.

Korda, playing for the first time since his victory in last month's Grand Slam Cup, overwhelmed Jakob Hlasek 6-0, 6-2 in the men's singles and then teamed with Jana Novotna to beat Hlasek and Manuela Maleeva-Fragniere 6-4, 6-4 in the decisive mixed doubles.

Maleeva-Fragniere gave seventh-seeded Switzerland the 1992 champion, the lead when she beat Novotna 6-4, 7-5 in the opening women's singles.

Left-hander Korda occasionally faltered on serve, but produced some searing groundstrokes in both the singles and the doubles.

The Czech pair exploited Hlasek's fragile serve in both the men's singles and the mixed doubles. Hlasek's serve was broken seven times in the singles and four times in the mixed doubles.

"We had chances to win the

mixed doubles, but unfortunately Jakob couldn't hold his serve," said Maleeva-Fragniere.

Hlasek never was able to put any pressure on the hard-hitting Korda in the men's singles.

The lanky Korda sizzled through the first set in just 17 minutes, hitting passing shot winners from amazing angles.

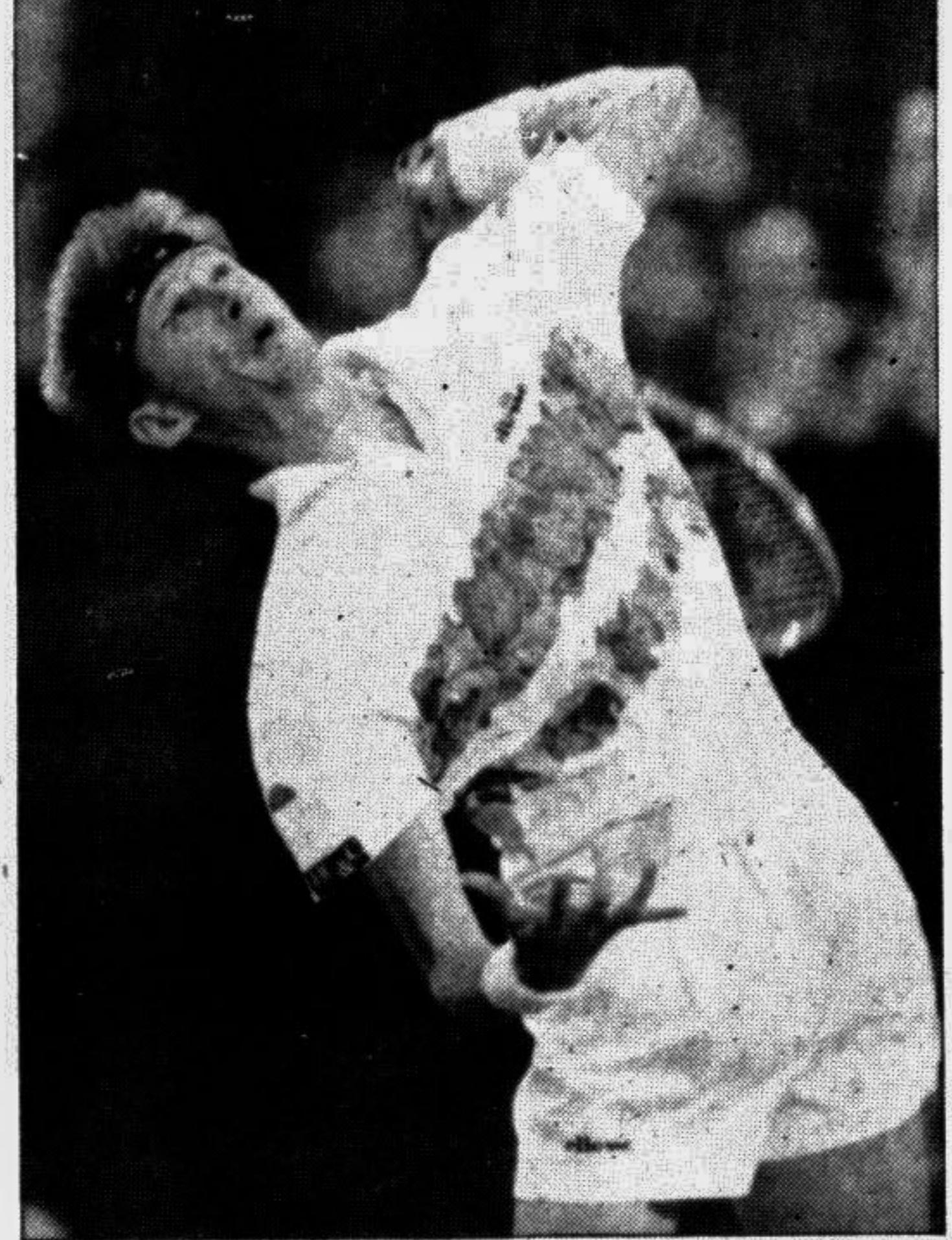
The second set was only slightly less one-sided and the contest was over in 51 minutes — the quickest of the tournaments so far.

"Petr is capable of playing amazing tennis like that," said Hlasek. "I never got the feeling I was in the match. It was very strange."

The 12-nation tournament is sponsored by Pepsi and continues through Friday night. The winning pair will collect \$134,000.

The Hopman Cup is one of a series of events leading up to the Australian Open, which begins Jan 17 at the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne.

"We had chances to win the



Petr Korda of the Czech Republic serves against Jakob Hlasek of Switzerland in the quarterfinal of the Hopman Cup tennis tournament in Perth yesterday. Korda won the match 6-0, 6-2.

— AFP photo

Easy wins for Stich, Edberg

DOHA, Jan 4: World No 2 Michael Stich and fifth-ranked Stefan Edberg eased into the second round of the dls 525,000 Qatar Open tennis tournament Monday, reports AP.

Stich needed just 59 minutes to defeat unseeded Frenchman Stephane Simian 6-2, 6-1, while Edberg took 70 minutes to beat South African wild card entry Gary Muller 6-1, 6-4.

Several of the top players are using the tournament as a warm-up for the first Grand Slam event of the season, the Australian Open in Melbourne later this month.

Edberg will carry a back injury into the second round where he will meet fellow Swede Anders Jarryd, who ousted Henrik Holm, also of Sweden 6-4, 7-6 (7-5).

Stich, who won the ATP Championship final in Frankfurt and led Germany to the Davis Cup at the end of last year, said his victory over Simian went according to plan.

"There is nothing to learn at this stage of the season. You have to make sure that the timing and rhythm are just right," said the German star.

In other first round

matches, Austria's Gilbert Schaller defeated qualifier Lars Rehmann of Germany 7-6 (7-4), 6-1.

Top seed Pete Sampras, the current world No. 1 and reigning Wimbledon and US Open champion, plays his first match Tuesday against Moroccan qualifier Karim Alami.

Sampras arrived Sunday and became the second tennis star to lash out at Boris Becker, who is not here to defend his title because his wife is expecting a baby. The stars are irked by Becker's suggestions that some of them use drugs to get through the grueling tour.

"It's not an accurate com-

ment and I was very surprised to hear Boris say it," said Sampras. "As far as I know, nobody takes steroids or any sort of enhancer. I certainly do not."

Sampras noted that the Association of Tennis Professionals, the sport's world governing body, has made it a point to reveal if anyone was caught taking drugs.

"What Boris said doesn't make any sense," he added.

Stich hit back at Becker when he arrived Thursday.

"It was a stupid comment to make," said Stich. "I don't know why he comes out with such things or from where he gets his ideas."

Becker had claimed in a

German newspaper interview last month that the tennis season was so long and grueling that many players need drugs such as cocaine and marijuana to get through it. He said this was making a mockery of the random drug tests carried out by the ATP.

The ATP denied Becker's

allegations, saying it has a strict anti-doping policy.

Also taking part in the Qatar Open are Croatia's Goran Ivanisevic, the runner-up to Becker here last year, and Frenchman Henri Leconte. Both play their first round matches on Tuesday.

One more singles match was completed Monday when Ronald Agenor defeated Spain's Jordi Burillo 6-4, 6-2.

However, later matches were disrupted when the level of humidity rose to 80 per cent and play was abandoned for the day because of slippery ground.

Four doubles matches and a singles match between Russia's Andrei Cherkasov and Germany's Karsten Braasch were postponed until Tuesday.

As a result of the postponed games, the start of Tuesday's programme was moved ahead by two hours to 1 pm (1000 GMT) instead of 3 pm (1200 GMT).

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