

Sampras serves a warning

SYDNEY, Jan 16: Pete Sampras has warned his Australian Open rivals that he fears no-one as he heads towards Melbourne for the first Grand Slam tournament of the year, reports Reuter.

After beating Ivan Lendl in the final of the New South Wales Open on Saturday, the 22-year-old world number one also revealed his desire to be regarded as one of the best players of all time.

"No, I'm not frightened of anyone. I feel that if I play my tennis, I can win," said Sampras simply. "I think I'm the favourite and I'm going to Melbourne with confidence."

Asked to respond to suggestions from his coach Tim Gullikson that he could become one of the greatest players the game has ever seen, he replied: "I've thought about it, particularly winning on clay at Roland Garros. Winning on every surface, that would prove to me I'm one of the greatest of all time."

"I'm only 22. As I mature I think I'll get better and better. Hopefully this will be another good year for me, like 1993 was."

Lendl, who has taken an interest in Sampras's progress from an early age, hailed Sampras as "One hell of an athlete" and poured scorn on those who think his now fellow-American is short on personality.

"It's sickening that someone who's down to earth, polite, behaves well, is reasonably clever and wears nice clothes has to apologise for the way he is."

Before linking up with Gullikson, Sampras once accepted Lendl's invitation to come and stay at his Connecticut mansion for a few days.

The master informed the pupil he possessed all the shots but needed to be more disciplined in his use of them. He had few problems getting the message across. "When I looked round the house and saw everything Lendl has got," recalled Sampras, "I thought to myself, 'If I knuckle down, I can have the same.'" Lendl has also spent time in recent days giving an insight into the pressurised world inhabited by those who reach the coveted number one spot. Having spent

a record 270 weeks at the top himself, his advice is to ignore other people's expectations.

"What the public expects is that you win every match, but that's not possible," said Lendl. "I don't think anyone is remembered by how long they've been number one... it's by how many Grand Slam titles you win."

Listening to Sampras, the echoes of Lendl's philosophy are almost deafening.

"I'm not trying to put too much pressure on myself to-

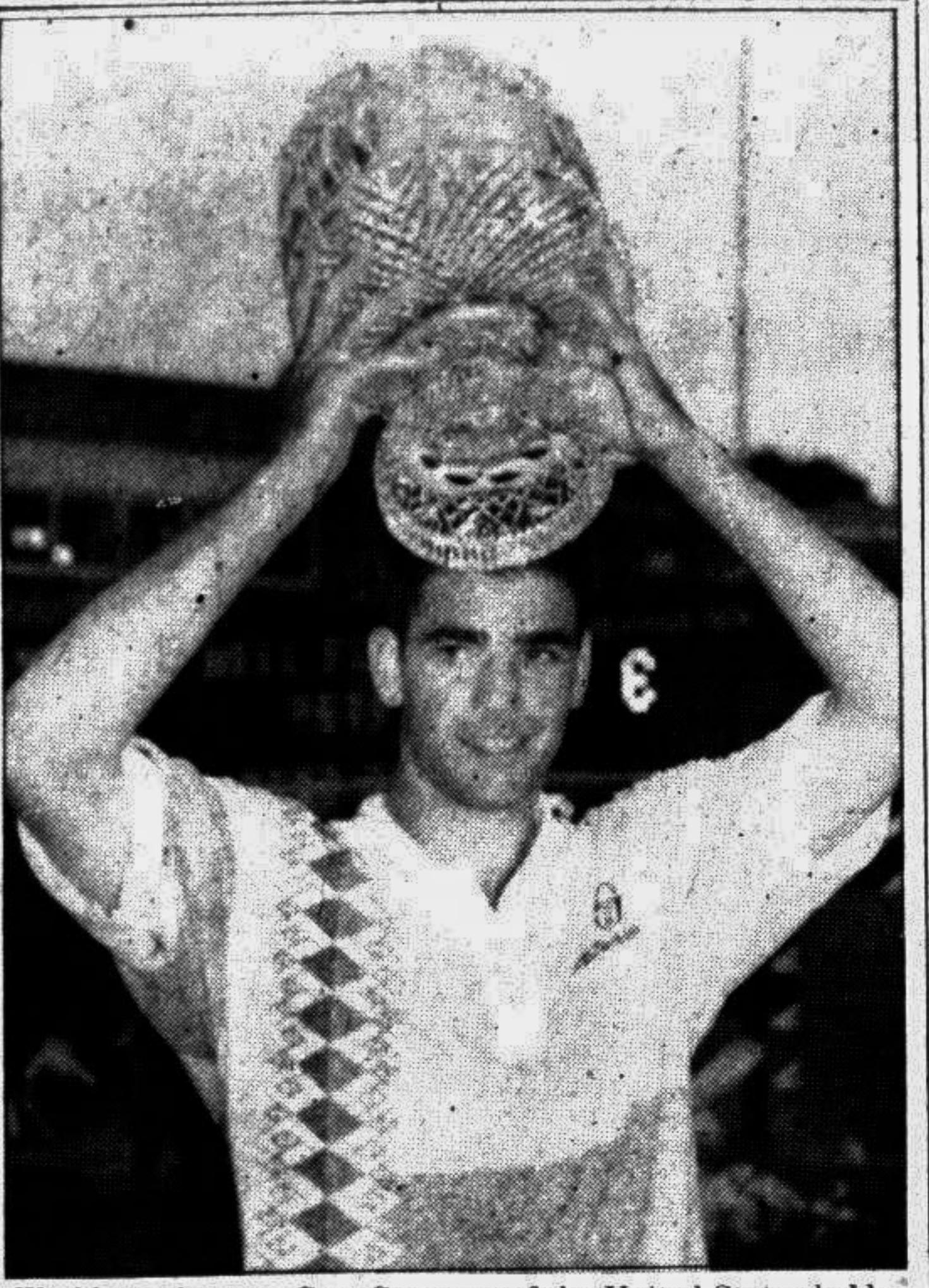
tion from happier matches.

"Wimbledon was as big a victory as I've ever had," he said recalling his win over Jim Courier last July.

"I need another Slam to prove to people that I'm not going to crack under pressure. It was huge, especially mentally, probably the biggest victory of my career."

It also left the Australian Open, along with the French, as one of the few Sampras has still to crack.

Free of the shin splints



World number one Pete Sampras of the United States holds aloft the Waterford crystal trophy after beating compatriot Ivan Lendl in the final of the New South Wales Open in Sydney on Jan 15. Sampras defeated Lendl 7-6 (7-5), 6-4.

— AFP photo

stay at number one. It's just a ranking... winning the major titles is more important.

"The expectation has been there for some time. I feel I've been a target for some time now, but I'm getting used to it. It's part of my job."

The scorn which greeted the American's loss to 204th-ranked Karim Alami of Morocco in the first round of the Qatar Open this month was typical. Sampras, not surprisingly, prefers to draw inspiration from his coach Tim Gullikson, who has a record 270 weeks at the top himself, his advice is to ignore other people's expectations.

"I've thought about it, particularly winning on clay at Roland Garros. Winning on every surface, that would prove to me I'm one of the greatest of all time."

which previously bothered him and with main rival Jim Courier struggling with his motivation, he knows this year represents the perfect opportunity.

"Next week will be a big challenge... there are four or five guys who can win it," he insisted.

Asked, nevertheless, if he fancied repeating Courier's now-familiar plunge into the River Yarra, he replied with a smile: "I can swim."

Aussie Open needs a star

MELBOURNE, Jan 16: The Australian Open needs a personality.

With most of the captivating characters of tennis skipping the first Grand Slam event of the year, the tournament seeks an interesting individual or two as it opens Monday, reports AP.

The list of no-shows is a virtual Who's Who of the sport's most popular players — Andre Agassi, Boris Becker, Michael Chang, Monica Seles, Jennifer Capriati, Martina Navratilova.

Agassi is recovering from surgery on his right wrist. Becker is in Europe awaiting the birth of his first child. Chang couldn't fit the US dhs 5.37 million Australian Open into his schedule.

Other top men are out because of injury. Spain's Sergi Bruguera has a bad shoulder. Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands and Andrei Medvedev of Ukraine have knee problems, and David Wheaton of the United States has a hip injury.

Seles had hoped to make her comeback at the Australian Open, which she has won three straight times, but still has not recovered from being stabbed in the back by a spectator during a match last April in Hamburg, Germany.

Navratilova, who won three Australian Open titles in the early 1980s, has not played in Melbourne since 1989. Capriati, fighting burnout, is taking some time off from tennis.

Few of the top players in Melbourne can match the pas-

sion or court artistry of those who will be absent. Players such as top seeds Pete Sampras and Steffi Graf are technically excellent, but have little of the flair of their missing peers.

Sampras, who defeated Ivan Lendl in the final of the New South Wales Open Saturday, comes into the Australian Open with confidence.

Jim Courier, trying to become the first non-Australian man to win three straight titles in Melbourne, will seek to rebound from a listless end of 1993 in which he seemed to lose interest in tennis.

The other top men's challengers include two-time champion Stefan Edberg, hard-serving Goran Ivanisevic

Top seeds Bambang Suprianto and Rudy Gunawan beat Christian Jacobsen and Jens Eriksen of Denmark 15-1, 15-8 in the men's doubles.

The Indonesians' aggressive smashing overwhelmed the Danes, who played a defensive game which relied mainly on drop shots.

In the women's doubles, Finarsih and Lili Tampi overcame a stiff challenge in the first game to beat Denmark's Lotte Olsen and Lisbet Stuer-Lauridsen 15-9, 15-4.

2 Algerian coaches banned

ALGIERS, Jan 16: Algeria have banned two coaches from the national soccer team for life for their part in Algeria's disqualification from the African Nations Cup, the Sports Ministry said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

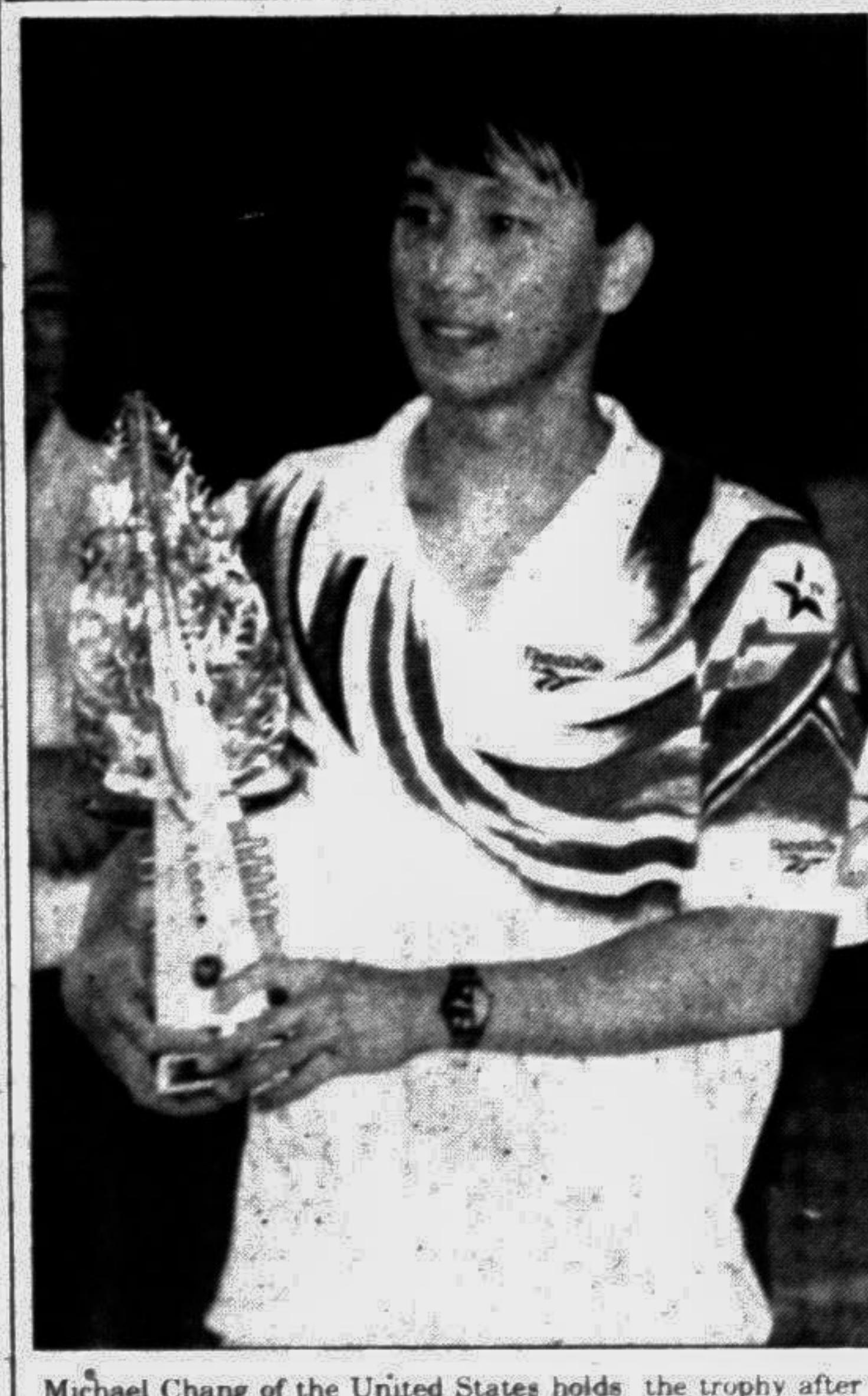
The ministry said Meziane Ighil and Abderrahman Mechaoui have also been barred from any coaching in Algeria for a year and the team's administrative manager, Mustapha Mechouar had been banned for life from Algerian national sports.

The ministry has also banned Reda Abdouche, former secretary general of the National Soccer Federation, from Algerian sports for a year.

Algeria were expelled from the competition for fielding a suspended defender, Mourad Karouf, in a qualifier in Dakar in January 1993 when they beat Senegal 2-1.

They would have qualified for the 12-team finals in Tunisia next March after taking second place in their group.

— AFP photo



Michael Chang of the United States holds the trophy after beating Czech David Rikke in the final of the Indonesian Open in Jakarta on Jan 15. Chang won 6-3, 6-3.

— AFP photo

Gustafsson wins New Zealand Open

AUCKLAND, Jan 16: Top seeded Magnus Gustafsson of Sweden swept past American Patrick McEnroe 6-4, 6-0 Sunday to win the dhs 313,750 New Zealand Open tennis title, reports AP.

Gustafsson, ranked 14th in the world, showed he is in top form going into the Australian Open, which begins Monday in Melbourne.

Gustafsson won the sixth title of his career, while McEnroe has yet to win a title.

McEnroe's serve was broken in the first game of the match — and that set the pattern.

Gustafsson, playing in his 15th final, controlled proceedings from the backcourt with his lethal forehand and solid serving. Anything too short from McEnroe was rocketed straight back with pace and accuracy.

McEnroe, ranked 73rd coming into the tournament, tried to mix his game up and was keen to attack the net, but the accuracy of Gustafsson's passing shots didn't allow him many opportunities.

When he did get to the net, he missed a number of easy volleys.

"I am so happy," said Gustafsson, who had not previously won a hard court event. "It is a big surprise for me, a very big surprise."

"But also it's a big advantage to be seeded. You don't have to play the best guys in the first rounds."

Gustafsson, 27, said being the top seed had placed a little more pressure on him to win and he had been very nervous before the start.

"Most other times I have been the underdog in the finals. This time being the favorite I got a little bit more nervous," he said.

McEnroe said his poor start put him in trouble.

"Once he won the first set he started playing a lot better," he said.

Indonesian shuttlers in fine form

TAIPEI, Jan 16: Indonesia dominated the finals of the Taipei Masters Invitation badminton championships on Sunday, winning four of the five events, reports Reuter.

Defending champion Heryanto Arbi, attacking from the start with powerful cross-court smashes, cruised to a 15-3, 15-2 victory against Denmark's Thomas Stuer-Lauridsen in the men's singles.

The lanky Stuer-Lauridsen, who also lost to Arbi in last year's final, looked slow and made many unforced errors.

"I was in pretty good shape today and was able to concentrate," Arbi, who took home a first prize of 7,150 dollar, told a news conference.

Top seed Susi Susanti had an equally comfortable victory against Kim Ji-Hyun of South Korea in the women's singles, winning 11-2, 11-5.

Kim rallied from 1-4 down to 4-4 in the second game, but Susanti retained her composure and finished off the match by alternating smashes with drop shots.

"I never felt intimidated... I just became more and more used to the court," Susanti said.

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They would have qualified for the 12-team finals in Tunisia next March after taking second place in their group.

— AFP photo

Date's first major title

SYDNEY, Jan 16: Kimiko Date won her first major singles title outside Japan today when she upset American Mary Joe Fernandez 6-4, 6-2 in the women's final at the New South Wales Open, reports Reuter.

Date, seeded fifth and ranked 13th in the world, also seems to respond positively to playing higher-rated players. She conceded only nine games in total during wins this week over Fernandez and world number four Conchita Martinez.

Fernandez instantly broke her opponent's serve at the start of the second set but again it proved a false dawn.

Date, still mixing the occasional dramatic mishit onto her steady baseline game, won six of the last seven games and hustled to victory in 84 minutes.

It was never a classic final

and Fernandez, an impressive semifinal winner over Gabriela Sabatini, was a big disappointment after taking an early 3-0 lead in the first set.

The delighted Date's reward was a cheque for US \$60,000 dollars, US \$18,000 dollars more than Pete Sampras received for winning Saturday's men's final. The women's event has a higher rating on the WTA tour than its male counterpart has in the ATP calendar.

Date's win confirmed the rising profile of Japanese players in Australia following her compatriot Mana Endo's success in the Tasmanian Open earlier in the weekend.

The champion's limited knowledge of Australian tennis history, however, was exposed after the prize-giving ceremony. Asked if she enjoyed meeting ex-champion Evonne Goolagong, who presented her with the trophy, Date confessed she had never heard of her.

Speaking via an interpreter, she also revealed she would be putting the biggest cheque of her career straight into a deposit account and was hoping for more success in Melbourne.

In the opening games, however, such a scenario looked unlikely as Date's almost embarrassing early attempts to volley at the net helped give Fernandez an instant advantage.

The American world number seven was two breaks up within minutes, allowing Date just six points, and even slipped in a couple of aces on

her way to a 4-2 lead.

At that point, however, her game fell apart for no obvious reason, allowing Date to reel off four games in a row and take the set in 47 minutes.

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