

Graf faces Sanchez today

Sampras, Martin in final

MELBOURNE. Jan 28: It's an all-American final between two all-American guys. It's the top player in the sport — Pete Sampras — against no-name Todd Martin at the Australian Open, reports AP.

Sampras was awesome in ending the two-year reign of his friend and rival Jim Courier, winning 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 in the semifinals on Friday without dropping a serve.

Martin was methodical, and occasionally inspired, as he defeated two-time champion Stefan Edberg of Sweden, the No. 4 seed, 3-6, 7-6 (9-7), 7-6 (9-7), 7-6 (7-4) to progress to the first Grand Slam final of his career.

Sampras, the world's top-ranked player, kept on track for his third successive Grand Slam title. He already is the Wimbledon and US Open champion.

He took just 2 hours, 2 minutes to outplay Courier, his friend and sometime golf partner.

Sampras will be bidding to become the first man since Roy Emerson in 1964-65 to hold the Wimbledon, US Open and Australian titles simultaneously.

It will be the first all-American men's final at the tournament since Johan Kriek beat Steve Denton in 1982.

So complete was Sampras' dominance over the defending champion that Courier did not get a break point until the fourth game of the third set. Courier had only four forehand

winners in the entire match. "That was one of the better matches I've played so far in my career," said Sampras. "Everything really clicked today. I really couldn't play any better."

Both finalists are laid-back, deliberate and oh, so polite. Their Mom and Pop and Apple Pie images are a far cry from the brashness of their predecessors Jimmy Connors, John McEnroe and Andre Agassi.

Martin capitalised on Edberg's below-par serve to beat the 1985 and 1987 champion in a very tight match.

The fast-rising former college star said he was "pretty excited."

Edberg missed the opportunity to play in his sixth Australian Open final. He had been runnerup three of the previous four years.

Martin, a 23-year-old from Lansing, Michigan, has risen from 73rd to 12th in the world rankings over the last 12 months.

The No. 9 seed sent service returns rocketing past Edberg on both the forehand and backhand sides and frequently was able to pass Edberg when the Swede charged the net.

"He read my serve," conceded Edberg, who said he served at only "85 to 90 percent" of his ability.

The win took Martin 3 hours, 50 minutes.

"I've believed I could do this for a long time," said Martin, who has won only one title in his professional career.

Edberg was 24-13 in tiebreakers last year — the fifth best average in tennis — but Martin kept his nerve after squandering first a service break in the fourth set and then four match points in the final tiebreaker. He clinched victory with an ace.

Martin served consistently well throughout the match, hammering down 13 aces and only one double-fault. He hit 93 winners to Edberg's 74.

"He put up a very good performance," Edberg said. "He played three very solid sets and maintained a very high standard of play. I played a good match, but it wasn't enough to win."

Martin missed several passing shots by inches in the first set, when Edberg used lobs to strand the American at the net.

But those passing shots starting going in during the second set, as Martin rifled shots down both lines. Martin led the second set 5-3, but lost three straight games and had to win the set in a tiebreaker.

Edberg saved three set points in the third-set tiebreaker, including one easy volley at the net that Martin slammed wildly long. But Martin prevailed on his fourth set point, passing Edberg with a forehand shot and punching the air in triumph.

Martin also won the fourth set in a tiebreaker, taking it 7-4 after leading 6-0.

He slammed an ace down the middle, then hit a ball high into the stands and raised his arms in triumph.

Edberg, who had said before the match that Martin had nothing in his armory to worry him, patted the tall American on the back as they met at the net.

Even while he was scoring the biggest victory of his young career, Martin maintained his mild-mannered demeanor. He apologised after almost hitting a ballboy with a shot, and lifted his finger to his mouth to silence a spectator who yelled in triumph after an Edberg double-fault.

Martin became the lowest-seeded player to make the Australian Open final since Miloslav Mecir, also seeded ninth, lost to Ivan Lendl in the all-Czech 1989 final.

On Thursday Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario ended her semifinal jinx and then promised Steffi Graf her toughest match of the tournament in Saturday's women's final.

Sanchez-Vicario, a semifinal loser at Flinders Park for the past three years, took the elusive extra step in style with a 6-1, 6-2 annihilation of a disappointing Gabriela Sabatini.

World number one Graf had already registered an equally comfortable 6-3, 6-3 win over Japan's Kimiko Date, reaching the 22nd Grand Slam final of her career with plenty to spare.

'Gazza' lets off steam

ROME, Jan 28: England's temperamental midfielder Paul Gascoigne punched a photographer in the head here on Thursday evening after being followed while on a shopping trip, reports Reuter.

Gascoigne, who plays for Rome club Lazio, was taken briefly to a nearby police station for an identity check, the ANSA news agency reported.

The Englishman was accompanied by a young woman in a city centre square when photographer Lino Nanni, from the International Press Agency, followed them inside a shop and started taking pictures.

Furious, Gascoigne turned round and punched him. Police were quickly on the scene and the incident was reported.

As the couple entered the police station, Nicola Amoroso, a reporter with Rome daily Il Tempo who was with Nanni, and who had also taken a few pictures, was hit several times with a handbag by the footballer's friend.

Nanni went to the nearest hospital, the San Giacomo, for treatment for a bruise on his forehead.

It was Gascoigne's s-latest unhappy brush with the Italian press.

Last year he belched into a television microphone and also shoved photographers in a Rome bar.

Cash crisis hits Cameroon

YAOUNDE, Jan 28: FIFA has just blocked 100 million AFC francs to Cameroon for their World Cup preparations, a reliable source revealed here on Friday, reports AFP.

The news comes on the day Cameroon World Cup spokesman Paul Celestin Ndembiyemba said the nation's organising committee would be discussing World Cup accommodation plus sponsoring spin-offs.

Also, weekly journal Dikalo said on Thursday English company Reebok offered 3 billion AFC francs (5m dollars) in sponsorship for the Lions. However, the offer was not confirmed on Friday by Cameroon officials.

India wants Krishnan back

NEW DELHI, Jan 28: Indian tennis veteran Ramesh Krishnan, who quit the sport in a huff, has received an SOS from non-playing captain Jaideep Mukherjee ahead of the Davis Cup tie against the United States, reports AFP.

"The country needs him. I need him and the other players respect him," Mukherjee said here Thursday in an appeal to the 32-year-old Krishnan to reconsider his decision never to pickup a tennis racket for India again.

"As captain, I would like to have Ramesh in the team," the newly appointed non-playing captain said. "I cannot conceive the team without him. He is an asset."

Time is running out before the Americans led by Jim Courier arrive here for the March 25-27 tie on the Delhi grass courts and "Ramesh must decide very soon" to get himself match-sharp, Mukherjee added.

Krishnan, who even at his advanced age is still a better player than any other Indian around, quit after a tennis official accused him of playing in last year's Davis Cup semifinal against Australia just for the money.

The official, Ramesh Desai, said Krishnan had played despite being unfit. The player retaliated that the charge was ridiculous.

"I know Ramesh is hurt by the allegation and I am prepared to mediate," said Mukherjee, who replaced Naresh Kumar after the 0-5 defeat to Australia.

Krishnan was instrumental in taking no-hopes Indian to the last four stage with upset wins over Switzerland and France, their best performance since reaching the 1987 final which they lost 0-5 to Sweden.

He joined rookie Leander Paes bridging a 12-year age difference, and led India back into the elite 16-nation world group after relegation to the zonals.

"My aim is to survive in the World Group," said Mukherjee. "If we have Ramesh we may survive. Without him I don't think we have a chance."

He accepted that even if Krishnan is back the future is bleak for the team. "Playing the United States, the odds are stacked against us. And I don't expect us to be a force for the next two years."

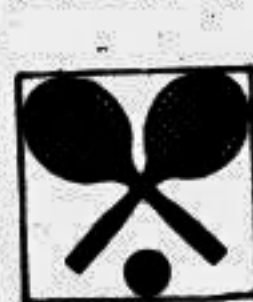
Krishnan nicknamed 'The Surgeon' for his precise touch game, had been contemplating an exit from the sport before the decision was forced by Desai's allegation.

A bad back that needs constant care, nagging injuries and an expanding waistline have been cited by critics who think he should stop playing.



American Todd Martin acknowledges the crowd's applause after a gruelling semifinal against Sweden's Stefan Edberg in the Australian Open yesterday. Martin upset the fourth-seeded Swede 3-6, 7-6 (9-7), 7-6 (9-7), 7-6 (7-4) to advance to the final. — AFP photo

An American sans ugliness



laconic.

The 23-year-old with a lantern jaw and the understated style charged into the front ranks of the Grand Slam millionaires Friday when he used his fierce serve and whiplash forehand to topple the stylish Swede, Stefan Edberg, reports AFP.

The Centre-Court triumph was the result of fortnight's work — a gruelling 12 hours and 36 minutes of tennis, often in searing heat — and Martin took everything the draw had to throw at him to get to the semifinal.

Apart from looking like a young Gary Cooper, Martin may also represent the face of the emerging tennis player in this boom-serve and volley epoch. At 1.98 metres (six feet, six inches) and 86 kilograms (190 pounds) he is one of the biggest men on the professional tennis tour.

And a top gun. He is widely feared for his 190 km/h (118 mph) serve. "It's my top weapon," he said after serving 13 aces to Edberg.

But Martin has improved immensely, developing into an all-court player with a good mind and a sound temperament.

Not for him the fines for obscenities, the snarls and the racket thrown down in disgust. He is under tight control on court, wiping his brow furiously with his wrist band when he gets nervous.

"I was raised to believe that there are a lot more important things in this world than a tennis match. I think this enables me to remain fairly calm on the court and I also just enjoy the game so much it is not hard to compete."

"I enjoy it a heck of a lot more when I am winning than when I am losing," he told AFP.

He was raised in Ohio and

Michigan where his parents still live. His father and his sister are lawyers and his mother works with computers.

At press conferences he does a lot of shrugging and smiling and comes off as a polite young man with a penchant for laconic answers.

In a very American way, his modesty can switch to startling self-confidence: "I think I have a good chance to beat Edberg," he said boldly as

Manchester to bid for 2002 C'wealth Games

LONDON, Jan 28: Manchester bounced back into Games action here on Thursday with a bid for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, reports AFP.

They were beaten out of sight by Sydney in the race for the 2000 Olympics last year, but bid chairman Sir Bob Scott, who also led the Olympic challenge, is confident of success this time.

"We were a little battle-weary at the time, but we're buoyant again, hungry and determined to win," he said.

"The Games would be good for Manchester, good for British sport as a whole and good for future generations."

First, though, Manchester have to convince the Commonwealth Games Council for England here next Wednesday that they should be the English choice ahead of London and Sheffield.

Lasovskaya soars

MOSCOW, Jan 28: Russian triple jumper Inna Lasovskaya beat her women's indoors world record, leaping 14.68 metres at the armed forces winter championships here Thursday, reports AFP.

Last January 14, she had set the previous world record at 14.61 metres, improving on the 14.47 metres set by Ukrainian Inessa Kravets on March 14, 1993 in Toronto

SC closes book on Modi murder case

NEW DELHI, Jan 28: India's Supreme Court has said the final word on the mysterious murder of badminton star Syed Modi, acquitting his widow Ameeta and politician Sanjay Singh of charges that they plotted the 1988 killing, reports AFP.

Judges Ratnavel Pandian and MM Punchi cleared Ameeta Modi, herself a former badminton player, and Singh of all charges relating to the "whodunnit" murder that allegedly involved a love triangle.

The judges on Thursday threw out an appeal by the Central Bureau of Investigation against ruling by lower courts acquitting the two accused.

"From whichever angle we examine the entire material placed on record, we feel that the prosecution has not made out a case of conspiracy against the two respondents," the judges said.

"Resultantly, we do not see any reason, much less compelling reason, to interfere with the well-reasoned and considered judgement of courts below," they said.

The Supreme Court is the last court of appeal, and the ruling closed the case which had a sensational mix of romance, violence, scandal, marital strife, sport, politics and mystery.

Syed Modi was a former Commonwealth Games champion who had no player in India to rival him at the time he was killed at age 27. He was shot dead on July 28, 1988 as he left a stadium in the northern city of Lucknow.

Investigators brought charges against seven people, including politician Singh and Ameeta Modi, whom they suspected of having an affair and plotting to kill Syed Modi. Singh and Ameeta Modi denied the allegations.

Rafter included

MELBOURNE, Jan 28: Patrick Rafter was included in an Australian Davis Cup team for the first time when he was named to a seven-man squad Friday by new captain, John Newcombe, reports AP.

Rafter, who has risen from 301st to 54th in the world rankings over the past 12 months, was named in the training squad alongside Richard Fromberg, Wally Masur, Jamie Morgan, Jason Stoltenberg, Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodford.

Newcombe said the Australian team to face Russia in a first-round World Group match in St Petersburg from March 25-27 would be selected from the squad, although Masur has said he will not be available.

"Wally has said he would like to take a few months to freshen up," Newcombe said. "But he has assured us he will remain an integral part of Australia's Davis Cup challenge."

Newcombe and coach Tony Roche were last week named to lead the Australian team after the retirement late last year of Neale Fraser.

Olympic flame due in Sweden Feb 4

STOCKHOLM, Jan 28: The Olympic flame will arrive in Stockholm on February 4 and stay for one week before being transported to Norway February 11 for the Lillehammer Winter Olympic Games, which begin February 12, reports AFP.

The flame, which will arrive from Helsinki, will be carried from the airport to Stockholm's Olympic Stadium carried by several of Sweden's most prolific athletes.

Flame carriers include skier Thomas Waisberg, who won the gold medal in the 15 kilometre cross-country race at the 1980 Olympics, and 1976 gold medal cyclist Bernd Johansson.



US figure skater Tonya Harding reads from a prepared text admitting she failed to notify the authorities of knowing about the attack on Nancy Kerrigan at a press conference at the Multnomah County Athletic Club in Portland on Jan 27. — AFP photo

AUSSIE OPEN NOTEBOOK

MELBOURNE, Jan 28: Goran Ivanisevic was Friday handed a dirr 6,000 US fine for uttering audible obscenities during his Australian Open quarterfinal loss to defending champion Jim Courier, writes AP.

The fine followed complaints to tournament organisers from television viewers, who said Ivanisevic could be clearly heard swearing in Croatian.

The fine was the third of the tournament for the fiery Ivanisevic, who earlier was fined dirr 350 US for ball abuse and dirr 500 US for racket abuse.

DOUBLES DOUBLE BID: Dutch pair Jacco Eltingh and Paul Haarhuis aim to start the new season as they finished the 1993 — as champions.

Eltingh and Haarhuis won the ATP Tour world doubles championship in Johannesburg late last year and now are on target to win the men's doubles at the Australian Open.

Eltingh and Haarhuis will play Byron Black of Zimbabwe and American Jonathan Stark in Saturday's final.

HERMETIC WORLD: Reporters from around the world are at the Australian Open, and it's not easy keeping the time straight back home in the cities they file to. Even the day of the week is tricky, since Australia, across the international dateline, is a day ahead of most of the rest of the world.

So media officials have three clocks on the wall of the press centre to help the tennis "journos," as reporters are called Down Under.

The clocks are marked: Roland Garros, Wimbledon, and Flushing Meadow.

That's the "real world" of the tennis journo, not Paris, London, or New York.

ANGRY TURNBULL: Wendy Turnbull believes being based in the United States cost her the job of non-playing captain of the Australian Federation Cup team.

Turnbull led Australia to the semifinals in 1992 and the final in 1993 but was earlier this week replaced by Lesley Bowrey.

Turnbull accused Tennis Australia, the sport's domestic governing body, of being unprofessional in the way it handled the captaincy issue.

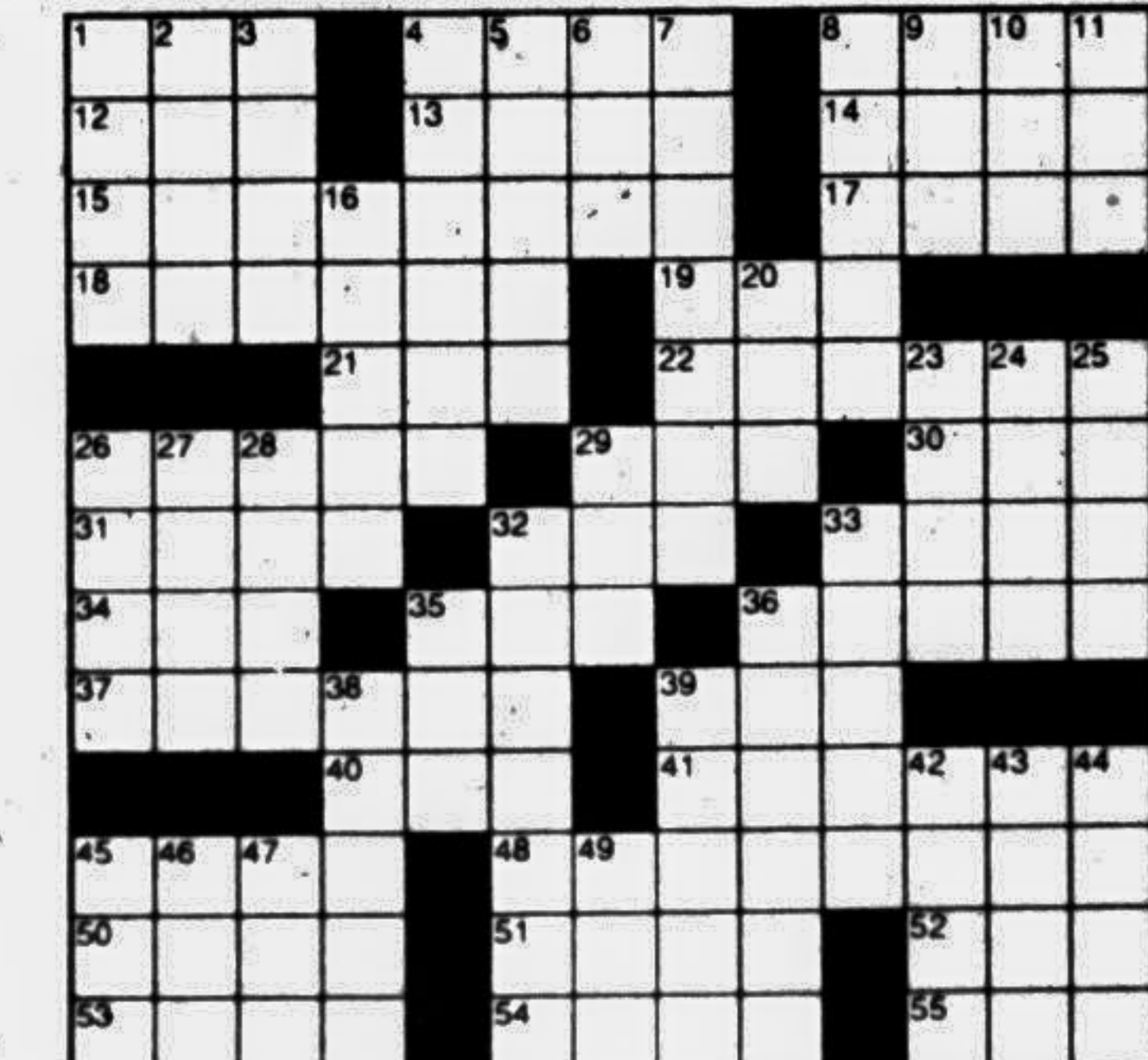
"The reason I live in Florida is because I can't make a living out of the game in Australia," Turnbull said.

Turnbull said her results with a team that has no stars should have assured her of reappointment.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Yesterdays answer 6-18



CRYPTOQUIP

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A W Z V J J A T Z M V J J V C
M N J L V A W T J N E
J K W F C G J F L
Yesterday's Cryptquip: THIEF CAUGHT AFTER
ROBBING SHIRTS IS HOT UNDER THE COLLAR.
Today's Cryptquip clue: Z equals G
The Cryptquip 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.