

Stich wobbles into semis

NEW YORK, Sept 9: Michael Stich double-faulted 15 times in his worst match yet at the US Open, but still managed to stutter-step into the semifinals, reports AP.

The highest-seeded man left in the tournament, the No 4 Stich created trouble for himself and got plenty from young Swede Jonas Bjorkman before escaping with a 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (7-9), 6-4 victory Thursday night.

Stich's next opponent is Karel Novacek, who served 28 aces to beat Jaime Yzaga 6-2, 6-7 (7-9), 6-1, 5-7, 6-3 and reach his first Grand Slam semifinal after 30 early exits.

Andre Agassi and Todd Martin will play in the other semifinal Saturday.

Stich, the 1991 Wimbledon champion, had never gone past the quarters at the US Open. There were times in this match when it seemed he wouldn't make it this time.

"I was serving very, very badly," said Stich, whose double-faults more than offset his 13 aces against the player who knocked out Stefan Edberg. "Right now I'm really, really tired. All the credit to Bjorkman, the way he kept fighting. He never gave up. Not many guys are doing that."

"Today I played my worst match of the Open. But it's very important to me that I made it into the semis, that I stayed in there."

Stich knew his performance would not convince many people he could win this tournament, but he didn't much care.

"Let everybody think Agassi's supposed to win," Stich said.

He cruised in the first two sets, held a 4-2 lead in the third, but let Bjorkman back in

by serving erratically. Stich, who also blew a 5-2 lead in the third-set tiebreaker, succumbed to tiredness and lost his rhythm as the match wore on.

Stich's loss in the tiebreaker cost him his first set of the tournament, and the way he was serving it seemed he could quickly lose another. But he broke Bjorkman to take a 3-1 lead in the fourth set, overcame one more poor service game, and broke him again for the match with a lob that Bjorkman leaped to hit with a backhand overhead and tapped just wide.

Novacek, a 29-year-old from the Czech Republic who logs more miles and plays more tournaments than anyone else, relied on his serve to get him out of trouble as he scored a victory over the man who upset defending champion



MICHAEL STICH

Pete Sampras in the fourth round.

After playing so well against Sampras, Yzaga played sloppily and slow, spraying 73 unforced

errors and carrying on a non-stop conversation with himself about his mistakes. He changed his shoes near the end of the first set, changed his rackets several times, but couldn't change the way he was playing.

The Sampras match took a lot out of me," Yzaga said. "I was sore yesterday and I was sore today. It was hard."

Novacek, who hit 78 unforced errors while playing mostly from the baseline, wasn't much livelier. Apparently bored fans talked on cellular telephones and read newspapers, rousing only to cheer Novacek at the end of a 3 1/2-hour match.

But none of that really mattered to Novacek, who was happy to get this far. In five previous US Opens, he never got past the third round. Despite his height — at 6-foot-3 (1.87 metres) he towered eight inches (20 cm) over Yzaga — Novacek's style is best on clay, and hardcourts have rarely been kind to him.

Ranked 56th, Novacek has been a professional since 1984. He's always been a good enough player to threaten the best but just never came close in the Grand Slams, getting only as far as the quarterfinals at the 1987 French Open.

"It was the dream destination to break the quarterfinals of the Grand Slams, and I am endlessly happy that I did it today," Novacek said. "I won 13 tournaments. I have been playing Davis Cup. I have been playing Masters. I have been playing everything basically that exists in tennis, but I never went to play semifinal of Grand Slams."

Elna Renach and Patrick Galbraith won the mixed doubles final, beating the top-seeded team of Jana Novotna and Todd Woodbridge 6-2, 6-4.

Navratilova honoured

OVIEDO, Spain, Sept 9: US tennis ace Martina Navratilova won Spain's coveted Prince of Asturias sports prize Friday for dominating her sport for more than ten years, reports AP.

International Olympic Committee chairman Juan Antonio Samaranch, who headed the prize jury, praised Navratilova as the "legendary tennis champion who, with 18 Grand Slam titles, has been at the head of world tennis for more than a decade."

Considered the Spanish-speaking world's equivalent of Nobel Prize, eight Prince of Asturias prizes in different fields are awarded each fall at a ceremony in this northern Spanish city. The winners are named periodically beginning in spring.

Prince Felipe of Asturias, the heir to the Spanish throne, presents the prizes, which include five million pesetas (dlsr 38,000) and a sculpture by Spanish artist Joan Miro.

Long course golds for Canada, Australia

ROME, Sept 9: Greg Stoppel of Canada and Melissa Cunningham of Australia won the 25-kilometre long-distance titles at the World Swimming Championships on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Stoppel, 10th when the event was first held at the 1991 Perth World Championships in the Swan River in Australia, took the gold in the men's race by just five seconds from 18-year-old Australian David Bates.

Stoppel, 26, completed the 25 kilometre course off the coast from San Felice Circeo harbour to Terracina in five hours 35 minutes 26.56 seconds.

Bates took the silver in 5:36:31.70 with Russia's Alexei Akatiev clinching the bronze in 5:37:26.43.

American defending champion Chad Hudeby could manage only seventh place in 5:43:07.43.

Cunningham won the women's race by a far more comfortable margin, completing the course nearly two minutes faster than Hungary's Rita Kovacs.

Title-holder Shelley Taylor-Smith, a fellow Australian, had to settle for bronze this time a further three minutes behind.

Cunningham won in 5:48:25.04, with Kovacs second in 5:50:13.66 and Taylor-Smith third in 5:53:12.82.

Hall in world wrestling semifinals

TAMPERE, Finland, Sept 9: Dennis Hall won three straight matches in the 57-kilo (125.5-pound) class and became the only American to reach the semifinals Thursday in the World Greco-Roman Wrestling Championships, reports AP.

Hall scored a takedown with 35 seconds left to clinch a 4-1 victory over Marian Sandu of Romania in the quarterfinals.

"I wrestled him last year and I knew he had a good arm drag," said Hall, who beat Sandu in his opening match a year ago in Stockholm, Sweden. "So I stayed away from his arm drag and I was able to add a few of my own."

Hall, who finished ninth in last year's championships in Sweden, shut out Swede Peter Stjernerberg 8-0 in the first round. In the second round he scored a come-from-behind 6-5 decision over Zheng Haibo of China.

Hall will face Alexander Ignatenko of Russia in Friday's semifinals. Ignatenko is a former two-time world champion at 52 kilo (114.5 pounds) and was a silver medalist in the 57-kilo division last year.

Easton begins

NEW YORK, Sept 9: As one of his first orders of business as a member of the International Olympic Committee, American James Easton will throw his support behind Salt Lake City as the site for the 2002 Winter Games, reports AP.

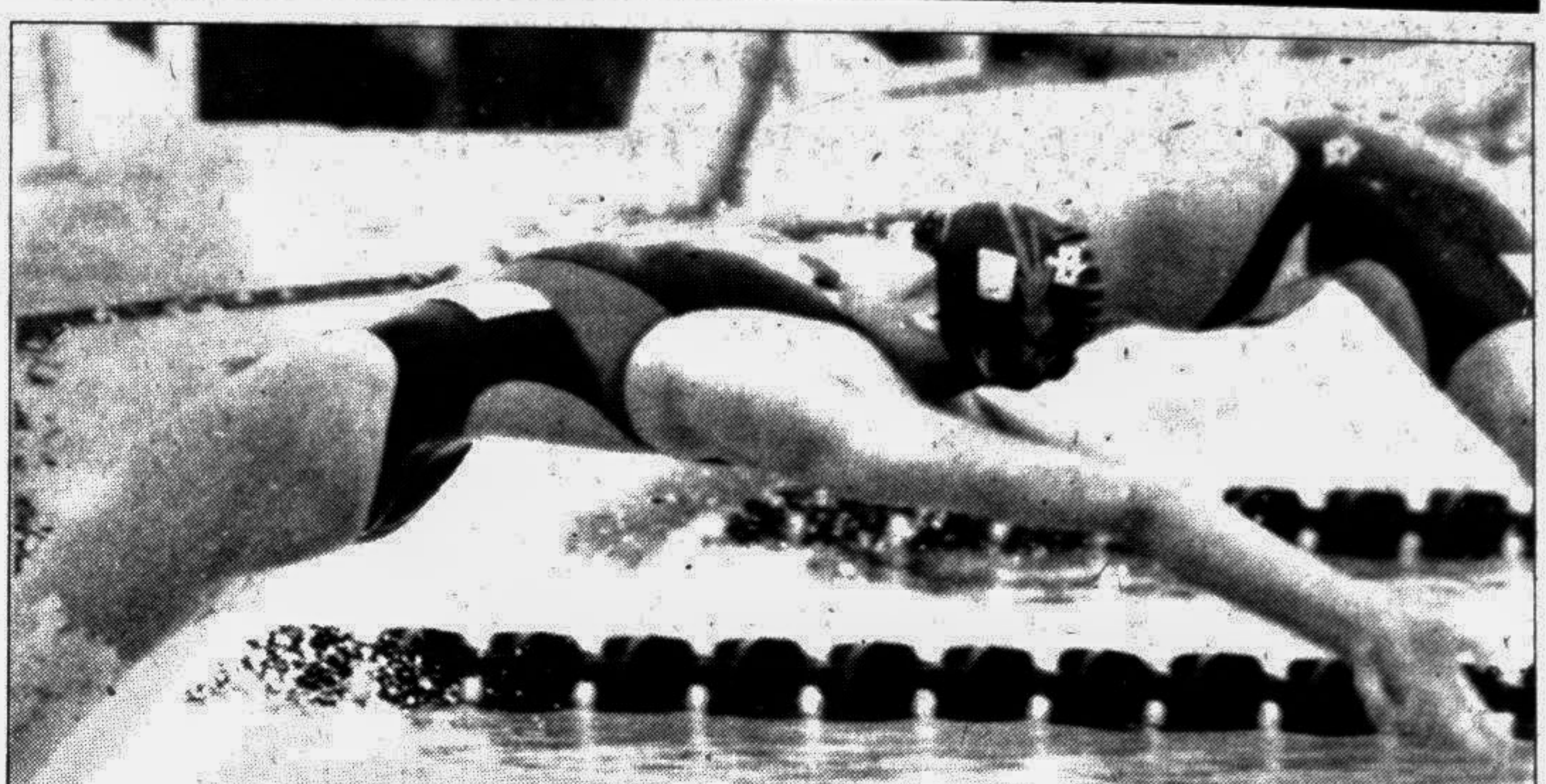
Despite citing Salt Lake City as a "front runner," Easton acknowledged there might be some anti-American feeling against the city.

"The one prevalent [pitfall] is that there would too much (Olympics) in the US," Easton said, referring to Atlanta in 1996.

"Technically, the venues are hard to beat in Salt Lake City. I've read the list (of other possible cities). Canada (Quebec City) may end up being a strong possibility. People might want to go to North America, but not the United States."

Easton acknowledged that a "conflict of interest" might be perceived in his lobbying for Salt Lake, though. He has businesses there, including manufacturing plants for aluminum baseball bats and archery bows.

Easton made the comments during a tele-conference Thursday introducing him to American reporters.



He Cihong of China begins her quest for the women's 400-metre gold at the World Swimming Championships in Rome on September 7. He finished first for her country's sixth gold in swimming with a time of 1:00.57. — AFP photo

Van Almsick makes it, Hase doesn't

ROME, Sept 9: Franz Van Almsick, Germany's 200 freestyle gold medalist and world record breaker, squeezed into the 100 butterfly final by a whisker and Dagmar Hase, the swimmer she controversially replaced in the freestyle final, lost out again in the 800, reports AP.

In another bizarre twist to the Van Almsick-Hase switch, it was ironic that the 16-year-old 200-metre titlist should just make it into the butterfly final as eighth fastest by 0.04 and that Hase, who dropped out so she could swim the 200, was 0.03 away from qualifying in her event.

Hase also was ninth fastest in the 400, at which she is Olympic champion, and failed to make that either. Although she collected a silver medal in the 800 relay, she wound up without a race in an individual final.

Van Almsick won the 200 final in world record time after failing to qualify. She was ninth fastest behind Hase but her countrywomen stepped aside to let the colourful teenager, who has some dlsr 4 million in commercial deals, swim the race.

In the butterfly heats, Van Almsick, who won two individual silver medals at age 14 at the 1992 Olympics, was third in her heat behind China's Qu Yun and Dutch swimmer Inge De Bruun. But her time of

1:01.49 just got her into the final ahead of American swimmer Amy Van Dyken, who swam 1:01.53.

Van Dyken also fished third in her heat behind Lu Limin, fastest in the world this year, and Australia's Susan O'Neill, but was ninth fastest.

Another American, Jenny Thompson, made it to the final as fifth quickest in 1:00.79.

World record holder Janet Evans was fastest qualifier for the 800 final in 8:31.91, almost half a second ahead of China's Luo Ping, who finished behind her in the same heat.

Hase finished fourth in her heat, won by Costa Rican 200 and 400 bronze medalist Claudia Poll, and clocked 8:40.98. For the second time in a row that gave her the ninth fastest time and no place in the final.

Japan's Akira Hayashi was the surprise quickest qualifier for the men's 200 breaststroke, almost 1 1/2 seconds ahead of the rest.

He won his heat in 2:13.94 and the second fastest was Russia's Andrei Ivanov in 2:15.42.

Hungary's Karoly Guttler, world record holder for the 100 breaststroke, made it as third fastest but a surprise non-qualifier was Australia's Phil Rogers, world short-course record holder, who finished third in his heat and 11th quickest overall.

Samantha Riley, winner of the 200 breaststroke on

Wednesday, swam 1:09.37 to be fastest qualifier for the 100 final. South African swimmer Penny Heyns finished just behind Riley in the same heat and was second fastest.

But there was no place in the final for Rebecca Brown, 100 breaststroke world record holder, who placed fourth in her heat and 14th overall.

The Brazilian quartet of Fernando Sherer, Teofilo Ferreira, Andre Teixeira and 100 bronze medalist Gustavo Borges were fastest in the 400 freestyle relay heats.

The Brazilians clocked 3:21.39 while the American team to Ugr Taner, Scott Jett, Chris Eckerman and Josh Davis were second fastest in 3:21.69.

Becky Dyroen-Lancer won the United States' second gold medal of the championships when she placed first in the solo synchronised swimming final.

Dyroen-Lancer, who also competes in the duet and team events Saturday and Sunday, collected 191.040 points to beat Japan's Fumiko Okuna with Canada's Lisa Alexander picking up the bronze.

Tom Dolan was the first American to win a gold here in Tuesday's 400 swimming medley, setting a world record in the final.

The diving competition ended Thursday with the United States taking home just one medal — a bronze — and four fourth-place finishes from

the World Championships.

While the Chinese were racking up a total of nine medals — four gold, four silver and one bronze — in the six events, and Russia grabbed one of each colour, the US struggled to its worst finish ever at a World Championships.

Coach Ron O'Brien maintained his squad's propensity for fourth did not disappoint him.

"It's encouraging from the standpoint that we have a lot of young divers," he said.

In the women's highboard, Mary Ellen Clark and Eileen Richetelli were second and third, respectively, after qualifying.

But they faded in the final, with Richetelli ending up fourth. So did Mark Bradshaw, the only diver to have competed at a world championships before, in the 3-metre springboard.

Karen Dalton, second after qualifying, just missed the medals in the women's 3-metre springboard and Cheryl Santini was fourth in the 1 metre event.

Brian Earley won bronze in the championships' first event, the 1 metre springboard. After that, nothing.

China's gold streak was snapped at four Thursday, as Russian Dmitry Sautin produced a stunning backward 1 1/2 somersault with 3 1/2 twists on his final dive off the 10-metre highboard to overtake defending champion Sun Shuei.

The Chinese diver earned silver and Russia's Vladimir Timoshini was third.

Medals table

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze
China	10	7	1
Russia	3	4	3
Australia	2	1	1
United States	1	4	6
Hungary	1	2	-
Sweden	1	2	-
Germany	1	1	4
Finland	1	1	-
Canada	1	-	1
Poland	1	-	-
Zimbabwe	1	-	-
Spain	-	1	-
Belgium	-	-	2
Costa Rica	-	-	2
Brazil	-	-	1
Mexico	-	-	1
New Zealand	-	-	1

It's down to the last four

NEW YORK, Sept 9: If winning the US Open is a test of endurance, then Arantxa Sanchez Vicario has to be a strong favourite to capture the year's final Grand Slam tournament, reports AP.

Gabriela Sabatini took 20 days off following her fourth-round disappointment at Wimbledon. A bad knee caused Steffi Graf to skip Hilton Head Island, SC, and she pulled out of an exhibition the week before the Open because of back spasms, while Jana Novotna withdrew from a tournament early in the year with a shoulder injury.

Only Sanchez Vicario has kept on playing.

Since Wimbledon — there's an eight-week break between the grass court tournament and the US Open — Sanchez

Vicario has played 35 matches, singles and doubles, and reached every possible final in five tournaments in four countries.

On Friday, Sanchez Vicario, seeded second, will play No 8 Sabatini and top-seeded Graf will take on No 7 Novotna. The winners will play Saturday with dlsr 550,000 awaiting the champion.

Only two of this year's three Grand Slam tournament winners have a shot at the US Open title: Graf won the Australian Open, Sanchez Vicario the French Open, Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez was beaten here in the third round.

Sabatini brings her own credentials into the semifinals on the hard course of the National Tennis Centre. Playing in her 11th US Open, Sabatini was a winner here in 1990 — her only Grand Slam tournament title.

"I need a big victory," said Sabatini, who hasn't won any tournament since capturing the Italian Open more than two years ago. "It could be against a player or it could be a tournament. I'm here to win the tournament, so I'm going to try to do everything I can. I have nothing to lose."

Ranked No 2 in the world for 47 weeks, Sanchez Vicario has been the leader of the Spanish surge in the sport. She won on the clay courts of Stade Roland Garros in June for the second time in her career, then teamed with Martinez to lead Spain to the Federation Cup crown.

Sanchez Vicario reached the US Open final in 1992, los-

ing to Monica Seles, and was ousted in the semifinals in both 1993 and 1990.

"She's playing better than in the past, and she is getting more confidence," Sanchez Vicario said of Sabatini. "But I'm going to play my own games, be aggressive and see what happens."

Sanchez Vicario has been aggressive her entire career. And she's always been one of the busiest players on the tour. Coming into the Open, she had a 58-8 record in singles.

Novotna almost won Wimbledon last year, when she was five points away from defeating Graf, only to lose.

"I don't even remember," Novotna said defensively when asked about her collapse. And she is quick to note that since then she has reached the quarterfinals of both the Australian Open and Wimbledon.

But Graf will be on the other side of the net Friday, and Novotna hasn't beaten the world's top-ranked player since 1992 in Chicago.

"Every match against Steffi is different," Novotna said. "It's very hard to play against her. If she is not playing as well and if she's making some errors and if I can stay with her, then I think I have a very good chance."

Graf, noting she is "trying to work around" her back injury, said she has been playing good tennis in her last two matches.

"I'm not trying to go for every shot and I am selecting my shots well," she said. "I also think my serve has been very consistent this week and it's doing a lot of damage."

Age restrictions to be imposed in WTA Tour

NEW YORK, Sept 9: The Women's Tennis Council said on Thursday that it agreed in principle to impose stricter limits on young players competing on the WTA Tour standing next year, reports Reuter.

The council, administrators of the women's tour, said at a news conference at the US Open that it agreed in principle with major recommendations of the Age Eligibility Commission, a panel of health and medical experts set up to conduct an independent review of the current eligibility rules.

The recommendations call for 14 year olds to be excluded from the regular tour, and then allowed to play in increasing number of tournaments from age 15 until 18, when a player could compete on an unrestricted basis.

"It's not appropriate that a woman play unrestricted before the age of 18," Dr Carol Otis, chairwoman of the six-month-old commission, told the news conference.

"We believe a gradual phasing into the tour would be appropriate starting at the age of 14."

Details of the new rules would be formally announced later in the year, the council said.

Under current rules a 14 year-old could compete in 12 tour events in a season, plus the year-ending championships. Currently, a player may compete without restriction at age 16.

New WTA Tour president Martina Navratilova said in a statement released at the Open, "I'm glad to see many of the recommendations, especially putting a limit on how many tournaments the 14, 15 and 16 year olds can play."

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Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain and Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic check their rackets during their US Open women's doubles match against American pair of Lindsay Davenport and Lisa Raymond on Thursday. Novotna and Sanchez-Vicario won 6-2, 6-4. — AFP photo

Americans want FINA to act

ROME, Sept 9: American swimming officials are convinced some Chinese women are drug cheats and that the sport's governing body must act now to stop the Olympics Games in Atlanta becoming a mockery, reports AP.

"I have got a great deal of respect for the Chinese athletes and their coaches," national team director Dennis Pursley said Friday.

"But there is no question that the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming that they have an added advantage through drugs."

Pursley sees the Chinese team, who won six swimming gold medals and broke two

world records on the first three days of competitions here, building quickly to become a formidable force at the 1996 Olympics.

Pursley said that swimming's governing body, FINA, should act now to rid the sport of drug cheats.

"FINA must be bold enough to do that and suspend any nation that does not agree. And if any federation has a certain number of positive drug tests than that federation and its athletes should be suspended from competition."

"Unfortunately that would mean some clean athletes would be suspended, too. But it might prompt them to do something about the cheating that's going on."

The Chinese have adamantly

denied taking drugs and say their success is down to outstanding coaching and hard worked in training. They say they have co-operated with FINA over drugs tests.

FINA said it follows the same guideline on drugs as track's governing body, the IAAF, and the International Olympic Committee, and conducts out of competition tests. It says it has caught drug cheats from China, Germany and Indonesia in the past year.

Pursley said swimming faces the same problems it had when East German women were dominating during the 1970s and early 80s.

Allegations of drug taking also followed them around but were never proved at the time.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Bang the door loudly

5 Trail the pack

8 Pornography

12 Base for 35 Across

13 Altar

14 Heard reveille

15 Muscat's land

16 Retriever type, for short

17 Seeing red

18 Pablo Picasso's daughter

20 Luce publication

22 Italian chicken recipe

26 Aesopian narration

29 Shakers founder, — Lee

30 Crossword clue abbr.

31 Italian bread?

32 Mormons: abbr.

33 Jeans-maker

DOWN

9 And little kin

10 Guitar's

11 Danson or Kennedy

19 West of Hollywood

21 Author Fleming

23 Spanish port

24 Four-star review

25 Green acres?

26 Off by a half-tone

27 Gofer, e.g.

28 Wright or Righteous

32 Medicated tablet

33 Hangs around

35 La —, Bolivia

36 Wildebeest

38 Travis of C&W

39 Suggest

42 Acknowledge

43 Russian river

44 Low card

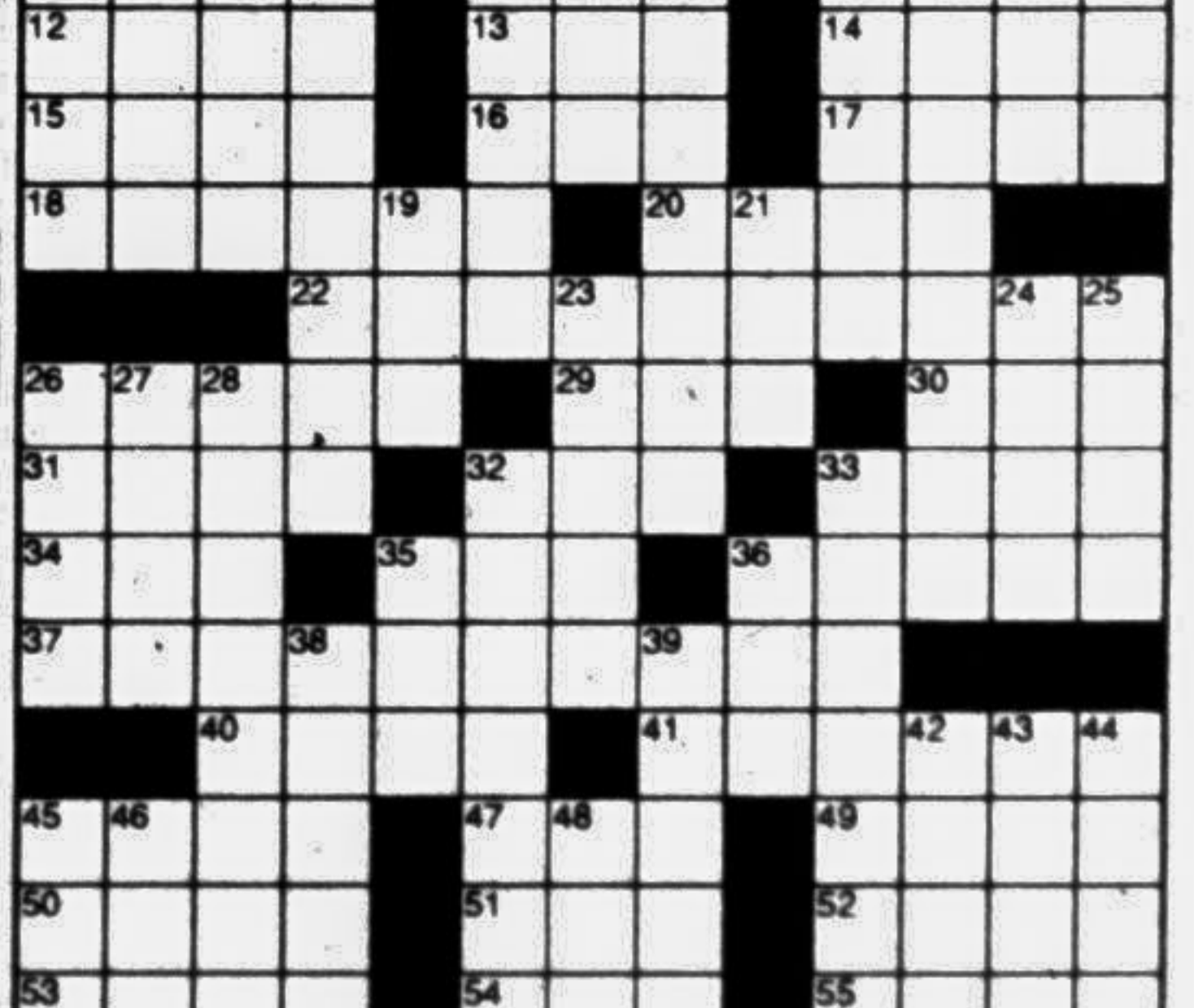
45 Reverential fear

46 Extinct bird

48 Have symptoms

Solution time: 23 mins.

FER MAD
LIME CALLA
SOBIG OGLING
OVERACHIEVERS
PER TRACY MAO
ATON PIPS
SCRAP COUGH
ATOM PAPP
BUN GUISE DOA
UNDERSTANDING
TOMATO AISLE
RIPEN ICKY
LED RES



CRYPTOQUIP

A Y P X P C P X P P L P L D
Q Y D X J P T E Q U T Z Y P G,
V J I P G G G Y P Z I O X P L
T C P O D X P A U P D E
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DISCONTENTED DRY-CLEANING WORKERS ARE STRIKING WHILE THE IRON IS HOT.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: C equals V

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.