

Sampras blazes with aces

ANTWERP, Belgium, Nov 11: Pete Sampras beat fellow American Richey Reneberg 6-3, 6-3 Thursday to reach the quarterfinals of the European Community Championship and remained the only star player in the 1.1 million dollars event, reports AP.

The world's No 1 showed no ill-effects from a throat infection that almost forced him out of the ECC early this week, and with his easy win, he was left as the only top-five seed in the tournament.

"I feel a lot better now. I gave the virus to Stefan (Edberg)," said Sampras after his textbook victory over Reneberg.

Edberg, the No. 3 seed, pulled out of tournament because of tonsillitis, giving American Jared Palmer a free ride into the quarterfinals.

It was uncertain whether Edberg would recover in time for next week's IBM-ATP Tour World Championship in Frankfurt. "I hope to be in good shape for next week," he said.

Patrick Rafter and Magnus Larsson, seeded sixth and seventh here and Sampras' main challengers now, both survived final set tiebreakers before getting that far.

Rafter won two tiebreaks to edge fellow Australian Richard Fromberg 7-6 (7-5), 2-6, 7-6 (7-3) and will meet Palmer in Friday's quarterfinal.

Larsson saved a half dozen match points before prevailing

over France's Cedric Pioline 6-4, 5-7, 7-6 (14-12).

Another seed, No. 8 Jaime Yzaga, was less lucky, as Byron Black of Zimbabwe, ranked 76th in the world, beat him in three sets 6-3, 5-7, 6-3.

Canadian Sebastien Lareau, fresh from a win against second-seeded Michael Stich, beat Amos Mansdorf 7-6 (8-6), 6-1. It was the Israeli's last professional tennis match. He is retiring at 29 because he

The serve is still my biggest shot. I live and die by it," he said after firing 13 aces past the luckless Reneberg.

He opened the second set with two love-games on his service before turning the heat on Reneberg. With lightning returns and cat-quick reactions at the net he broke serve in the fifth game.

Navratilova, the most successful tennis player in history, is retiring after the tournament, which marks the final stop on the 1994 women's tour. The 38-year-old has won 167 singles titles and earned more than \$100 million since turning pro in 1973.

Reneberg, ranked 33rd in the world, earned a breakpoint in the next game, but his last chance for making it a match died, when a Sampras return hit the net cord and bobbed onto Reneberg's side.

"Better lucky than good," Sampras said.

Rafter, ranked 20th in the world, need 2 1/4 hours to squeeze past his compatriot, ranked 33 places below him. "Playing another Aussie was half the battle," he said.

"I'm excited," Sabatini said. "I love to play against Martina, and it's going to be very special because it's her last tournament. I want to win, too. I hope we can play our best and make it a good match."

Navratilova won 18 Grand Slam titles, including nine Wimbledon titles, in singles, 31 in doubles and six in mixed doubles. Navratilova decided earlier this season that this would be her last on tour.

She is seeded sixth in the Virginia Slims Championships, which runs from Monday to Nov. 20. The tournament includes the top 16 players in the world.

The other first-round matches includes Steffi Graf vs. Brenda Schultz; Amanda Coetzer vs. Mary Pierce; Jana Novotna vs. Iva Majoli; Anke Huber vs. Lindsay Davenport; Kimiko Date vs. Magdalena Maleeva; Natalia Zvereva vs. Conchita Martinez; Julie Halarad vs. Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

Sampras played solid throughout the match. The defending champion broke early and served himself out of trouble in the ninth game to win the set 6-3 in 30 minutes.

It was hurting my wrist when I touched it," Davenport said. "The ball would bounce off my racket, and my hand would just bend back."

Schultz will play fifth-seeded Natalia Zvereva in the next round. Zvereva defeated Julie Halarad 6-1, 6-4 on Thursday.

Pierce will next play 16-year-old newcomer Meilen Tu, who defeated Katerina Maleeva 6-4, 6-3. Tu, a wild-card entry from California, won the second time on the tour to advance to the quarterfinals.

No 4 Gabriela Sabatini got off to a slow start before beating Joanne Kruger 6-4, 6-0. Sabatini will play Chanda Rubin in the quarters.

Schultz, clocked with the hardest serve at 113 mph (181 kph) earlier this year, hit two aces in the final game of the third set to win the match.

Pierce, ranked fifth in the world, remains the highest seed in the tournament after top-seeded Conchita Martinez was knocked out in the first round.

Natalie Tauziat, who beat Martinez in her first match, was eliminated by Kimberly Po 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 less than 18 hours after her upset victory. Po won the final two games and beat Tauziat with a backhand lob at match point.

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Schultz hit consecutive aces in the third set, prompting a frustrated Davenport to scream, "Get me out of here." The 18-year-old American took a 3-2 lead in the third but was broken at 4-4 before the 23-year-old Dutchwoman served for the match.

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