

Penev joins Atletico

MADRID, June 30: Valencia's Bulgarian striker Luboslav Penev has signed a two-year contract to play for Atletico Madrid from next season, Atletico officials said, reports Reuter.

Penev, who returned to the Valencia team in the second half of last season after several months' treatment for cancer, signed a contract on Thursday with Atletico director-general Miguel Angel Gil, son of club chairman Jesus Gil.

The tall, Rangy Penev, 28, has been one of the most consistent goalscorers in the Spanish League since he came to Valencia from CSKA Sofia in 1989.

Atletico Madrid narrowly escaped the relegation playoffs last season and have signed successful Serbian coach Radomir Antic from Real Oviedo in a bid to revive their fortunes.

Miguel Gil told reporters: "We are now signing people the new coach thinks suitable and a player like Penev in this mould."

Chairman Gil has declared interest in Croatian midfielder Robert Prosinecki, a Real Madrid reject who returned to top form with Oviedo under antic, but no deal has yet been struck.

In another move, long serving Barcelona midfielder Eusebio Sacristan has gone to Celta de Vigo on a free transfer.

The 31-year-old Eusebio, 13 times capped for Spain, had been with the Catalans since 1988 but had made only sporadic first team appearances in the last two seasons.

Shilton to Coventry's rescue

COVENTRY, June 30: Peter Shilton, the 45-year-old former England goalkeeper, has joined Premier League club Coventry City, reports Reuter.

Shilton has signed a three-month contract as cover for regular goalkeeper Steve Ogrizovic who broke his leg in May and will miss the early part of the season starting on August 19.

Ogrizovic will not be ready until September so Shilton will come in to do an insurance job, said Coventry manager Ron Atkinson on Thursday.

Shilton has played almost 1,000 league matches during his career with Leicester, Stoke, Nottingham Forest, Southampton, Derby, Plymouth and Bolton. He was capped 125 times by England.

Becker, a bit philosophical

LONDON, June 30 (Reuter): Teenagers once yelled for Boris Becker. Now they scream for Andre Agassi. Becker likes it that way.

Becker rocketed to stardom 10 years ago when he won Wimbledon at the age of 17.

He instantly overtook Chancellor Helmut Kohl and footballer Franz Beckenbauer to become the world's most famous German.

Now, his tennis appetite restored, the three times champion is hungry again. Swede Jan Apell crumbled 6-3, 3-5, 6-1 and 6-2 on Thursday when faced with a serving onslaught from the red-haired "Mr Boom Boom."

Becker was once the wonderkid who dived his way into the record books on the velvet turf of Wimbledon. Today he is a 27-year-old multimillionaire with a wife, baby son and philosophical approach to the trappings of sport stardom.

"I actually never really liked to be that much in the spotlight," Becker confessed.

"I'm kind of glad that Andre took that place and I hope he's a long time in the tournament so people care more about him than anybody else."

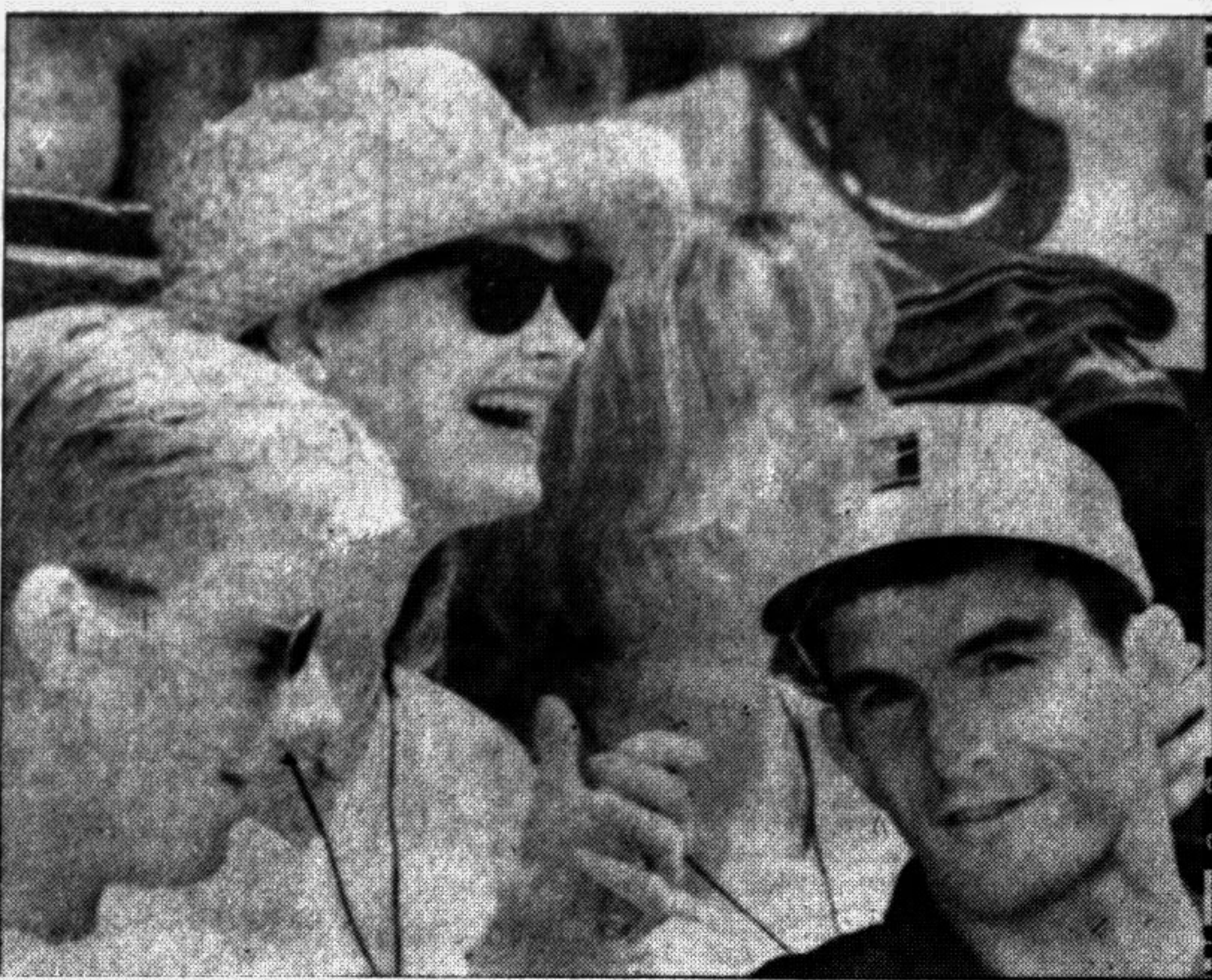
That teenage win was no flash in the pan. Becker has now won Wimbledon three times and been in six finals. He also has captured two other Grand Slams — Australia and the US.

For Becker, now ranked number four in the world, his love affair with Wimbledon endures after a decade.

"I think I always have a chance of winning this title. Some years I was closer than others but I have always had a chance and I feel like I have a chance this year."

"But he does have one nostalgic regret after the exit from the tournament on Thursday of his old Wimbledon adversary, Sweden's Stefan Edberg.

"Stefan and I had many important big matches. He's 2-1 up on me here. I would have loved to level it. We may play next year again. But unfortunately the competition gets tougher, especially in the first round, these days."



Andre Agassi's longtime girlfriend actress Brooke Shields applauds as he wins a game against Patrick McEnroe at the Wimbledon championships on June 29. — AFP/UNB photo

WINDOW ON WIMBLEDON



LONDON, June 30: It was another hot day at the Wimbledon, specially for the two-time Wimbledon champion Stefan Edberg on the show court number 14. He was beaten by a little-known Belgian by the name of Dick Norman who had spent seven months in hospital for surgery on both knees.

The 6ft 8in. tall Norman with a serve like a rocket blasted Stefan Edberg 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 in only 98 minutes. For the second year in a row Edberg failed to reach the third round at Wimbledon and it was also the second time that the lost to an unseeded player. Norman was extremely lucky to be in the main draw due to the withdrawal of Oliver Cross. Norman lost to Sandon Stoll in the qualifying tournament last week and was fourth on the waiting list of lucky losers.

But as Cross pulled out Norman got his chance and played a former Wimbledon Pat Cash of Australia who had to withdraw after the first set with a knee injury. His next opponent was 6ft 2in tall Edberg champion in 1988 and '90. Norman has, it seems, a knack for champions. His

From Tawfiq Aziz Khan

third round opponent will be Todd Woodbridge, twice a winner in the doubles. And after that it could be another champion Boris Becker of Germany, three times Wimbledon champion. In a post-match interview the red-head said quickly "I am happy."

AGASSI & BROOKE

On the Centre Court world number one Andre Agassi was in a hurry in close shop against Patrick McEnroe. In the second round match against McEnroe in front of his girl friend American actress Brooke Shields, Agassi gave quite a few lessons to McEnroe who was no novice in the game. His two handed backhand and a ferocious forehand landed along the baseline and that too in remote corners highly improbable for even the tastiest of players to reach. Andre, resplendent in his white outfit did not brook any nonsense or indulged in antics which he used to do occasionally, but meant business. He despatched McEnroe in 94 minutes and then went off to meet his love. Said McEnroe after the match, "He (Agassi) didn't try to mess around or make jokes. He went out there and kicked my ass". His brother

John McEnroe who won three singles title was at the courtside as a commentator. A couple of minutes before the start of the match a slight ripple went through the crowd in front of the Press Box. The crowd suddenly turned back and those with cameras started clicking. Before I could realise I saw a small group descending the steps of the box and taking their seats in the players box. Obviously it was Brooke Shields, the 30-year-old Hollywood star and girlfriend of Agassi, his coach Brad Gilbert and a couple other people. In the post match interview the "Pirate" replying to a question said, "Believer in marriage? Certainly, I mean, I'm a believer in love and marriage is something, I think, that has been tainted over the years. With all the high divorce rates, who knows what anybody considers marriage any more, but love I believe in."

Q: "Brooke said she would like to get married when she's 30. She is 30; do you think you may be that guy?" Ans: "She said that to you? She's never said that to me."

All these questions started when the journalists marked the identical diamond rings worn by the pair.

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Evert enjoying wifehood

WIMBLEDON, June 30 (AP): A visit to Wimbledon is easier now for Chris Evert. She no longer feels the pressure of performing. Her biggest concern is for her husband and two young sons.

"When you have a child, that's when reality hits," Evert said Thursday. "I'm just like any ordinary mom now. I feel like part of the human race."

The 41-year-old Evert, who will be inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame on July 16, won three of her 18 Grand Slam titles at Wimbledon. She also was beaten in the semifinals or finals 14 times.

"A lot of losses," said Evert, who played from the baseline and thus fared better on hardcourts and clay.

"Wimbledon was so much of a challenge for me because of my game," she said. "I had to learn to move on grass and be flexible with my strokes."

"I didn't like to win easy. Because it was a challenge, it meant more when I won a match at Wimbledon than any other major tournament."

But Evert, who retired in 1989, is now content to watch from the sidelines as a commentator for NBC-TV. She and former Olympic skier Andy Mill have two children — Alexander, 3, and Nicholas, 1.

"I didn't feel joy in tennis 24 hours a day. Now I feel joy in life 24 hours a day with three wonderful little boys," she said with a laugh.

"I remember times I lost when I was so depressed, I didn't want to leave my room for three days. Then you think of having a child, and your priorities are a lot different."

"In tennis you're dealing with a career, ego and pride. I felt a lot more pressure. I feel like a weight's been lifted since I retired."

Evert, who won 157 singles titles, will be the sole inductee this year at the Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island.

Costly Wimbledon for Henman!

LONDON, June 30: Disqualified British tennis player Tim Henman kissed and made up with injured ballgirl Caroline Hall at Wimbledon on Thursday — but it came too late to save him from a 3,000 dollars fine, reports Reuter.

Referee Alan Mills fined Henman 2000 dollars for hitting Hall with the ball and another 1000 dollars for being defaulted as a result.

Before the punishment was announced, Henman had presented Hall, 16, with a large bouquet of flowers and, to the delight of photographers, kissed his victim in a public apology.

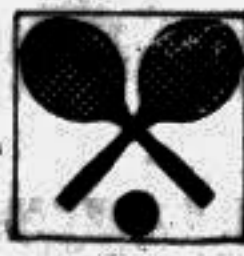
On Wednesday evening, Henman, 20, and his partner Jeremy Bates became the first players disqualified from Wimbledon in the Open era.

Their match with Swede Henrik Holm and American Jeff Tarango was locked at 6-6 in the fourth set when Henman struck a ball in anger and hit Hall hard behind the left ear.

The British pair were promptly disqualified while Hall had to receive treatment.

The injured girl said on Thursday: "I have seen the doctor and he said that I should rest although I wanted to come back to work today."

Ivanisevic turns up heat



LONDON, June 30: Goran Ivanisevic, twice a finalist but determined to go one step further this year and claim the most coveted title in tennis, powered his way into the fourth round at Wimbledon on Friday with straight sets victory over Frenchman Arnaud Boetsch, report agencies.

The 23-year-old fourth-seeded Croatian once again made a mockery of Wimbledon's attempts to slow down matches by using less-pressurised balls by slamming down another score of aces on a sun-baked Centre Court to score a 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 victory in just 84 minutes.

The stylish 26-year-old Boetsch, who lost his only previous match to Ivanisevic in Stockholm in 1993, had no answer to Ivanisevic's power and when he charged the net

he was left stranded by bullet passing shots. Ivanisevic now faces another big server in Todd Martin of the United States.

Martin, seeded 14 and a semifinalist twelve months ago, came back after trailing by two sets to one to beat fellow-American Derrick Rostagno in a five set thriller — 6-3, 4-6, 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.

In other early men's third-round matches, British wildcard entry Chris Wilkinson failed to sustain a bright start and was defeated by American newcomer Michael Joyce who went through 5-7, 6-4, 7-6 (7-3), 6-4.

American baseliner Aaron Krickstein outlasted Spaniard Thomas Carbonell 6-7, 7-5, 5-7, 6-3, 6-2.

After dropping just 10 games in his first two matches, Andre Agassi is in line for his first true test.

The top-seeded Agassi will

next face fellow American David Wheaton, a proven grass-court specialist who reached the Wimbledon semifinals in 1991.

Agassi, ranked No 1, and Wheaton, No 26, have split their six career meetings. Wheaton beat Agassi in five sets in the Wimbledon quarterfinals in 1991, but Agassi has won the last two matches, both on hard courts.

"I think he's a dangerous player who does all things well, except his movement would be his only weakness and his forehand is a little susceptible at times," Agassi said.

"We have had a few matches that have been close. I have won some, and he has won some. It's going to be a good step for me. To get through him will put me in a right position to start thinking about winning this tournament."

Michael Chang left Wimbledon empty-handed for the eighth year running on Thursday, heading a list of four men's seeds to tumble on the fourth day.

Fifth seed Chang, runner-up at the French Open, succumbed 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 to the sharper grass game of Czech Petr Korda, now ranked a lowly 56, but a fine serve and volleyer when fully fit.

In the early matches Friday, eighth-seeded Gabriela Sabatini, desperately trying to patch together a declining career, became the first player to reach the last sixteen when she scored a 7-5, 6-1 victory over Nancy Feber of Belgium.

The eighth-seeded 25-year-old South American, who was a losing finalist to Steffi Graf at Wimbledon in 1991, has been struggling to find consistency since winning in Sydney in her first event of the season.

She is playing in her 30th consecutive Grand Slam tournament.

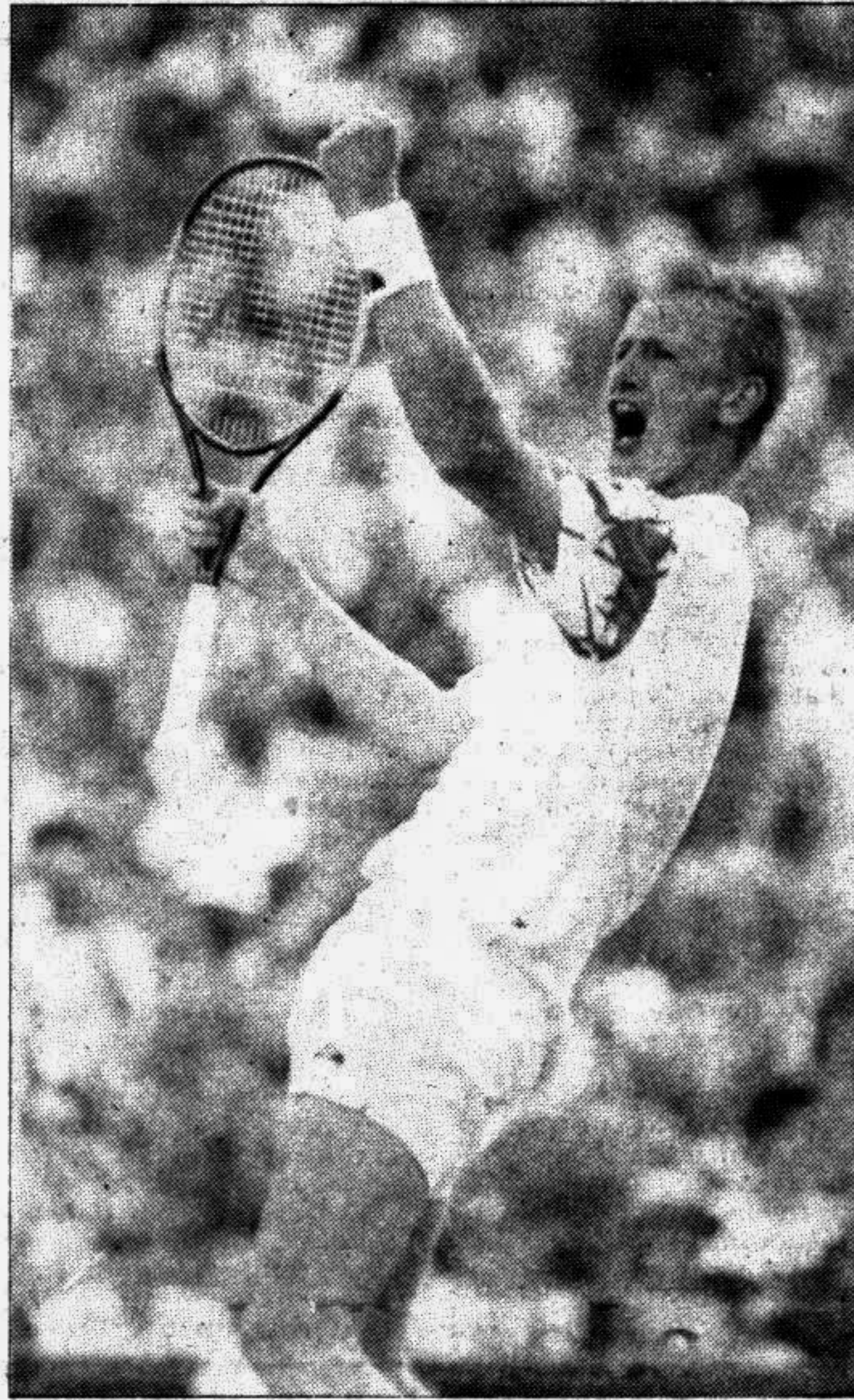
Sabatini now plays Lisa Raymond of the United States who beat Irina Spirlea of Romania 6-4, 2-6, 6-4.

Women's defending champion Conchita Martinez continued her easy stroll through the early rounds by beating Shaun Stafford, 6-1, 6-1, in 51 minutes. Martinez has lost only 11 games in three matches.

Brenda Shultz-McCarthy, the No 15 seed, beat Radka Zrubakova, 6-4, 7-5.

No. 2 Arantxa Sanchez Vicario was matched against Zina Garrison Jackson, making her 13th and final Wimbledon appearance.

Two-time men's defending champion Sampras was paired against American doubles specialist Jared Palmer.



Petr Korda of the Czech Republic exults after upsetting fifth seed Michael Chang of the United States in straight sets at the Wimbledon championships on June 29. Chang went down 6-4, 6-4, 6-4. —AFP/UNB photo

Courier — casual, candid



WIMBLEDON, June 30 (AP): His sun, stubble-bearded face turning pink in the

torrid sunshine of Court 2, Jim Courier walked up to the chair umpire and admitted defeat.

"Wish me a good flight home," Courier said to Paulo Pereira of Brazil.

Courier, suffering through one of many difficult service games, had just foot-faulted for a double fault on break point to give Cedric Pioline a 5-2 lead in the third set.

Courier laughed incredulously and stood motionless on the service line for more than 10 seconds after the call, vented his frustration at Pereira, sat down and

slammed his racket three times into the grass.

Fifteen minutes later, Courier's Wimbledon was over.

The 1993 Wimbledon runner-up had slumped to a 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 second-round defeat to the 58th-ranked Frenchman, Courier, who has somehow lost the edge that made him the world's top-ranked player for most of 1992, simply had no answers: on court or off.

"I don't know," said the 24-year-old Florida native, who entered this Wimbledon ranked and seeded 11th,

when asked to explain his decline. "Anything you want to tell me, you let me know."

Courier, who doesn't particularly enjoy playing on

grass, can still hit stunning returns and untouchable groundstrokes — enough to win three tournaments so far this year. But those shots came too fine and as between Agassi and Pioline — as they have against many other opponents and other surfaces this year.

Courier was reluctant to talk about it, but he eventually confessed what his fans have known all along: Tennis just doesn't matter as much as it used to.

"I think that there certainly is a change," he said. "I'm a couple of years older and certainly more mature in many ways, and I hope to continue changing throughout my life for the better. Whether it affects my tennis positively or negatively is neither here nor there."

Courier still peppers his remarks with salty words and phrases, belying the fact that has become known as one of the more cerebral players on the tour. He became a big hit among fans and media in Paris after learning to speak fluent French. He once asked reporters about the North American Free Trade Agreement during a match in Europe. He even read a book —

Armistead Maupin's "Maybe the Moon" — during changeovers at a match in Germany in 1993.

"Tennis is not the only thing that I'm here for," Courier said. "So hopefully I can continue to grow as a person, and hopefully my game will come back strong. I'd like to be able to play at that level without being... mean. It would be a real treat, wouldn't it?"

So is Courier trying to send a message, perhaps, to younger players who think that tennis is the be-all and end-all?

"I'm not saying that my way is the way," Courier said. "I think that to be a champion you really do have to be kind of self-contained and very driven at what you do, and I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing if your life is tennis and that's what you've dedicated yourself to, to not have other interests, if that's your choice."

Bad back bothers Graf



LONDON, June 30: Despite winning her 27th successive match to remain unbeaten in 1995, Steffi Graf conceded on Thursday that her chronic back problem is a bit of a worry, reports Reuter.

The French Open champion and world number one struggled to a second round 6-3, 7-5 triumph at Wimbledon over South African Amanda Coetzer after wasting a 5-2 lead in the second set.

The five times champion said her concern over the lower back condition that



forced her out of the Australian Open and several other events this year may have contributed to her failure to close out the match earlier.

"Maybe I was thinking about it a little bit," she said. "Sometimes I was like waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened but maybe my concentration was not 100 per cent."

Graf who also has 11 other Grand Slam titles to her name, said concern over her

up after the match with Hings.

"Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. It's something I've been living with for eight or nine years. Sometimes it comes, sometimes it doesn't."

"It doesn't tell me beforehand."

When asked if she felt her back could prevent her completing this tournament, "I don't feel that right now so I hope to live up to that," she replied. And could this be her last Wimbledon?

"No, I'm not thinking about that yet at all," she replied. "I hope it's not."

"That's why I waited so long about it, why it was such a difficult decision for me."

"It's something I was really looking forward to and I know it's one thing she was really looking forward to. I don't know how much I can say I'm sorry for it."

"I wish I wouldn't have had to do it, but there was no other way."

But the German did not feel she had waited too long to decide, that she might have ruled herself out weeks ago.

"There are weeks when I feel so good. Why shouldn't I wait and try? It's something I didn't think about, that I might have to default."

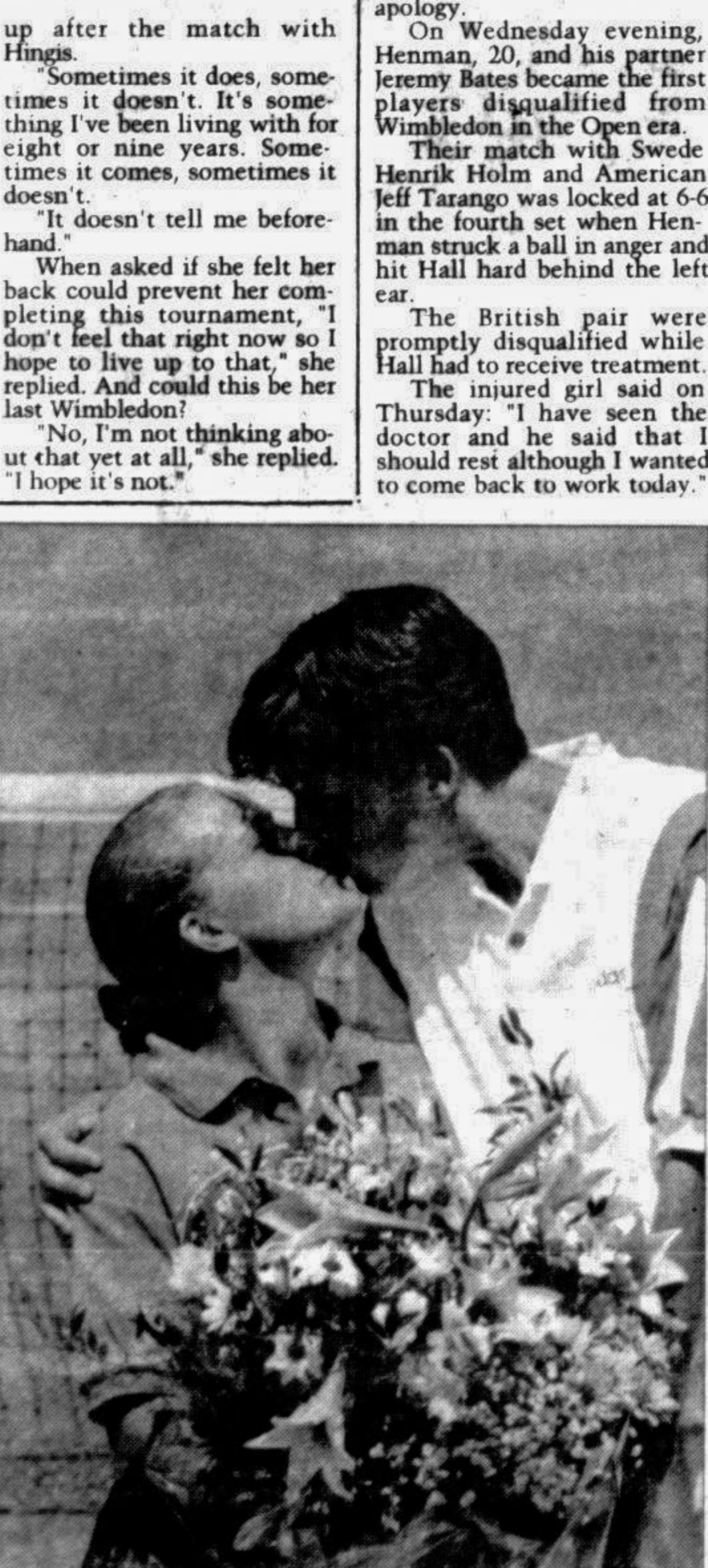
"I didn't think it a couple of days ago, I thought it (playing) wouldn't be such a difficult thing."

Graf said her back stiffened

Jap corporate backing assured

ATLANTA, Georgia, June 30: Japanese companies pledged their support to the 1996 Olympic souvenir brick programme here Thursday, trying to help revive a plan that is 10 million dollars short of projected revenue goals, reports AFP.

Japanese consul general Yuji Miyamoto said a promotional programme in Japan and at firms with US offices was aimed at selling 100,000 of the souvenir bricks that will be used to finance Centennial Olympic Park.



Britain's Tim Henman kisses ballgirl Caroline Hall after presenting her with a bunch of flowers on June 29. Henman became the first player to be disqualified at the Wimbledon championships after striking a ball in frustration which injured Caroline's ear. — AFP/UNB photo

WIMBLEDON NOTEBOOK

LONDON, June 30 (Reuter): Wimbledon once had its own tannery of pigs and hens.

That was in World War Two when the venue for the world's most famous tennis tournament was also used for drilling troops and training ambulancemen.

It did not escape unscathed. In October 1940, German bombers attacked the club, striking the Centre Court roof and destroying 1,200 seats.

The hallowed turf court remained untouched until 1976 when vandals broke into Wimbledon, dug holes in the Centre Court and daubed the stand with paint.

Hollywood has twice come to Wimbledon — even if mercurial Romanian Ilie Nastase refused to lose on camera. In 1976, Rod Taylor and Christopher Plummer took to Wimbledon for action in the royal box for "Nobody Runs Forever".

In 1978, it was the turn of "The Players" starring Dino Martin, son of crooner Dean Martin, and Ali McGraw.

Among the real players participating in the picture, Nastase was true to form. His pride was too great to admit defeat. He settled for "retired hurt" when knocked out of the fictional tournament.

LAMBOYANT Frenchman Henri Leconte was asked what he most liked about Wimbledon crowds when he retired this year. "Silence," was his instant answer. The contrast with New York, Paris and Rome could not be more stark. The Wimbledon crowds are so polite they even applaud politely when the ball girls and boys come on court.

Spectators are urged in the programme: "Do not make a noise during a rally." Try saying that to the Roland Garros crowd in Paris.

Bad sportsmanship is definitely a poor show. They are firmly instructed: Do not applaud a net cord or a double fault.

And the yuppies who pour down from London's financial district every evening suffer severe withdrawal symptoms. The Wimbledon announcer warns them: "Portable phones are forbidden around the courts."