

Graf, fighter to the core

NEW YORK, Sept 8 (Reuters): World number one Steffi Graf continues to astonish even those closest to her with an amazing ability to keep winning while her personal world is falling apart.

Once again on Saturday, just two days after the start of her father's trial on tax evasion charges in Germany, Graf managed to keep her focus on tennis long enough to advance to her fourth consecutive US Open final.

"How she goes and pulls it together... I knew the recipe I would be the greatest coach in the world," Graf's coach, Heinz Gunthardt, said with wonder and admiration.

The trial began on Thursday with the tennis superstar's father facing a possible 10 years in prison if convicted.

"Sometimes she can't get her head together on the court. Five minutes she will hit well and she then will hit it all over the place. It makes it very difficult for her to practice," Gunthardt said.

"I am unusually somebody that starts well from the beginning on so that is not my character," admitted Graf, who had to stave off five set points in the first set against Hingis.

"Not one of those set points she saved can you say she got a present from Hingis," said Gunthardt. "You can't say Hingis choked."

"At crunch time Steffi knuckled down. That's the mark of a champion."

Familiar foes in the final

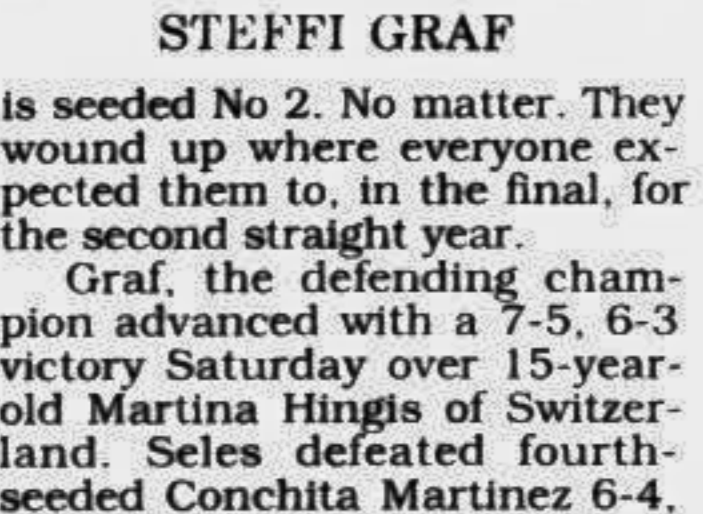
NEW YORK, Sept 8: It was not easy. It was expected.

No. 1 Steffi Graf and No. 1 Monica Seles are meeting for the title. It has a familiar ring, report agencies.

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Graf, the defending champion advanced with a 7-5, 6-3 victory Saturday over 15-year-old Martina Hingis of Switzerland. Seles defeated fourth-seeded Conchita Martinez 6-4.



STEFFI GRAF

6-3 before rain halted play on Friday.

Graf preyed on Hingis' inexperience early with some disguised drop shots and tactics designed to leave the 16th seed flat-footed in mid-court.

But it was Hingis, who beat Graf earlier this year in Rome, who came up with the first service break for a 5-3 edge as the German squandered a 40-0 lead on a string of overhit forehands and a backhand error.

The Swiss held her first set point while serving for the set in the next game, but Hingis belted a forehand into the net and threw her racket in disgust. A backhand wide on the next point had the emotional teen bouncing her racket off the court and a missed volley gave Graf the game.

Hingis gave Graf all she could handle in the next game as the German was forced to fend off four more set points before holding for 5-5.

Hingis dropped the next game and Graf quickly went up 40-0 when serving for the set.

Graf needed only one set point, and perhaps she was picturing the prosecutor who is trying to keep her father behind bars when she unleashed an explosive forehand into the corner to take the set.

On a roll now, Graf broke Hingis to open the second set and held to win her sixth consecutive game.

But Hingis did not fold, regrouping to keep it close as she saved two break points in the seventh game to pull within 4-3, after which both players left the court to change their sweat-soaked outfits.

Hingis took her time, keeping Graf waiting, and the top seed made her pay for it by winning the next game for 5-3 and building a quick 40-0 lead on Hingis' serve.

Again, the holder of 20 major titles jumped on her first chance to end it, drawing Hingis toward the net before belting a perfect forehand pass down the line for victory.

Afterward, Graf was asked how tough it had been to keep her focus on tennis with her father on trial, facing a 10-year prison sentence on tax evasion charges.

"Pretty difficult," she said.

Graf is playing in her fourth consecutive US Open final, including two against Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, a win in 1993 and a loss in 1994. Graf's first two US Open titles came in 1988-89.

It will be Graf-Seles' 12th career meeting, with Graf holding a 7-4 lead, including last year's US Open, when she posted a 7-6 (8-6), 0-6, 6-3 victory.

They also are meeting in the usual spot, the final.

Only in their first two meetings in 1989 — the French Open semifinals and the fourth-round at Wimbledon — have they played before the title match.

At 27, Graf is five years older than Seles, but between them they have dominated women's tennis in recent years.

Graf is seeking her sixth consecutive Grand Slam tournament title and has a 41-match Grand Slam streak going into Sunday's final. The Open era record is held by Martina Navratilova, who won 45 consecutive Grand Slam tournament matches between 1983-84.

The last time Graf lost a Grand Slam tournament match was two years ago in the US Open final to Sanchez-Vicario.

She won her 100th singles title at Wimbledon in July. That also was her 20th Grand Slam singles crown, surpassing Helen Wills Moody to take sole possession of second place on the career list behind Margaret Smith Court's 24.

Graf also won the French Open this year after skipping the Australian Open while recovering from foot surgery.

Seles won the Australian Open, her first Grand Slam tournament title since returning to tennis. She was stabbed by a spectator during a tournament in Hamburg, Germany, in April 1993 and didn't return to the sport until August 1995.

Komen, 20, followed up his world record 3,000 metres last Sunday with a tactical victory in the 5,000 metres that showed maturity beyond his years. His win earned him 250,000 dollars—200,000 dollars for winning the overall crown and 50,000 dollars for winning the 5,000 event.

Engquist completed one of the most remarkable turn-arounds in the sport's recent history with her victory in the 100 metres hurdles in 12.61 seconds which guaranteed her the women's overall title and a similar cash windfall of 250,000 dollars.

Two years ago Engquist was locked in a legal battle with the sport's authorities and was banned from competing after a doping ban imposed while she was still competing for her native Russia.

That ban was eventually cut short by the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) last December, and since then she has become a Swedish citizen, won the Olympic title and now the overall Grand Prix title.

"It is beyond my wildest dreams," she said. "When I was fighting my case and living in a small apartment in Russia I could never have imagined anything like this."

Komen, who has been prominent in junior athletics, but made his mark as a senior only this season, crowned a glorious week in which he smashed Nouredine Morcelli's 3,000 world record in Rieti, Italy, last Sunday with a victory over another of the year's emerging stars, Salah Hissou of Morocco, the new 10,000 world record holder.

It's Daniel-Ludmilla's day

MILAN, Sept 8: Daniela Komen and Ludmilla Engquist of Sweden captured the last major honours of a momentous summer of athletics on Sunday when they were crowned the overall winners at the Grand Prix final, reports Reuters.

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Komen clocked an electrifying 55 seconds for the first lap of his 5,000 and then traded places with Hissou over the last 1,000 metres before breaking away with 300 metres to run and coming home in 12 minutes 52.38 seconds.

Hissou was second in 12:54.83 and the win was worth an extra 100,000 dollar to the Kenyan. If he had finished second in his race, Britain's Jonathan Edwards would have taken the overall title because he won the triple jump and that would have given him more points in the overall rankings than Komen. Edwards took second place overall with prize money of 150,000 dollars.

Although Komen and Engquist emerged as the biggest winners of the day, the outstanding performance of the meet came from 36-year-old Merlene Ottey of Jamaica who lifted herself into second place on the all-time list of women sprinters when she won the 100 metres in 10.74 seconds.

The only woman ever to run faster is Florence Griffith Joyner who clocked four quicker times in 1988 when she set the current world record of 10.49 seconds.

Ottey's time was the fastest run since Griffith Joyner clocked 10.62 in a qualifying round on her way to winning the Olympic title in 1988 and Ottey was delighted afterwards.

"That is the fastest I have ever run and I felt so good today. I had really worked hard for this race and felt I would win it."

Not only was her time impressive but also the style of her victory. Trailing Olympic champion Gail Devers until around the 80 metre mark she blazed past the American in the last few strides to earn herself 150,000 dollars in prize money by finishing second in the overall standings.

Michael Johnson, who became the first man to win an Olympic 200-400 double in Atlanta, and also set two world 200 metres records this summer,

chalked up his 57th straight victory over 400 metres in 44-53 seconds, but Olympic champion Nouredine Morcelli's four-year unbeaten run over 1,500 metres or the mile came to an end.

Morcelli was outpaced over the home straight by Hicham el Gherrajdy of Morocco, the younger gaining some consolation for the fall in the Olympic 1,500 metre final which cost him a medal.

It was Morcelli's first defeat over 1,500 metres or a mile in 56 races since 1992, a signal that his position as the best distance runner in the world is now under serious threat.

Nebiolo keeping fingers crossed

MILAN, Sept 8: World athletics chief Primo Nebiolo called on Michael Johnson and other top athletes on Friday to show their true strength by going to the solidarity meeting in Sarajevo.

Johnson, the centre of attention after his 200m/400m Olympic double, had yet to make up his mind Friday afternoon whether he would go to the Bosnian capital after the Grand Prix finals here on Saturday.

Johnson told AFP: "I still haven't decided yet, but I hope to today."

Nebiolo, whose International Amateur Athletic Federation is organising transport for athletes to and from Sarajevo, made it clear he hoped the Texan would decide to come.

"I hope so," said the Italian. "We will not oblige anybody. Who is strong and brave will come. Who has does not have these feelings will stay at home."

Asked about speculation that as athletes were reticent to make the trip, he said: "I'm confident it's not just non-Americans who will have the courage to go."

"I think 80 per cent of those in Milan will go. I trust the courage and dedication of the athletes."

Nebiolo said there was a simple message to be sent by the solidarity event.

"In life, we must live in friendship and peace," he said. "This is very important. We are giving our modest contribution to friendship and peace between people."

Muif Memija, secretary general of the Sarajevo organising committee, said: "I was just talking to Johnson and his manager and I was surprised how suspicious they were."

"They wanted to know if there will be metal detectors at the stadium — there will be at every entrance — and what the feeling in Sarajevo was towards Americans."

Johnson aside, Memija had high hopes for the meeting at the 50,000 capacity stadium, rebuilt with money from the International Olympic Committee and the IAAF.

In 1988, Sarajevo hosted the Winter Olympics, and it was the biggest event in the history of Bosnia.

"As much as the Olympics meant, I think this event has more importance for the people of our country."

"Aside from the physical benefits and the rebuilding of the Chose Stadium, it is a political project — a threshold behind which there was war, cruelty and devastation."

"At the same time, it is a threshold that holds out prospects for reconstruction, for peace and for development. Sarajevo today is a peaceful town and we are doing everything for the security of every participant."

"Excitement and joy are the feelings of our people and everyone who come to Sarajevo on Monday will feel the special atmosphere."

Hingis begins to run rings round oldies

NEW YORK, Sept 8 (AFP): Martina Hingis may still be looking forward to her 16th birthday, but her run to the US Open semifinals showed she has the mind of a tennis veteran and more, the shots to match.

"She has been playing so well, and with the way she plays the point, it doesn't seem like you have somebody that young across the net," world number one Steffi Graf said after she halted Hingis' run on Saturday.

Hingis, who defeated third-seeded Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain and seventh-seeded Czech Jana Novotna to reach her first Grand Slam semifinal, was confident the day would come when she could put together enough victories over top players to win a major title.

"I think now is every tournament there will be more and more players like them, especially if I play like this tournament," said Hingis, who turns 16 on September 30. "It is very difficult for me to beat all three of them in one tournament — that is what I am going to try to do in the next tournament."

Hingis, whose one big weakness is her lack of power, is working on increasing her strength.

But her more experienced rivals say that even without a big serve or a big shot, she's a threat because of her court sense and skill.

"You can be intelligent and not have the shots for it," Graf said. "She has a lot of shots she can use, and that is why she can use her sense out there."

Hingis, who turned pro in October of 1994, opened her 1995 Grand Slam year with a trip to the quarterfinals at the Australian Open.

Goran, Andre sent tumbling

NEW YORK, Sept 8: World number one and defending champion Pete Sampras choked away one match point and wasted three more on Saturday before defeating Goran Ivanisevic in four sets to reach the US Open final, report agencies.

Despite the hiccup, Sampras beat the fourth-seeded Croatian 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (9/11), 6-3 to keep alive his hope of winning his first Grand Slam title of the year.

In the final he'll face second-seeded compatriot Michael Chang, who defeated sixth-seeded fellow American Andre Agassi 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

Sampras won the first two sets in just 59 minutes. The third set went with serve to the tie-breaker, and Sampras looked like wrapping things up quickly when he took a 6-3 lead with his service to come.

First Ivanisevic beat him with a two-handed passing shot, then Sampras double faulted.

He hit a forehand long to let Ivanisevic knot the score at 6-6. Then Ivanisevic hit a running forehand winner to give himself a set point.

Sampras saved that with an ace, then Ivanisevic netted a service return to give Sampras a fourth match point, which Ivanisevic saved with a volley winner for 8-8.

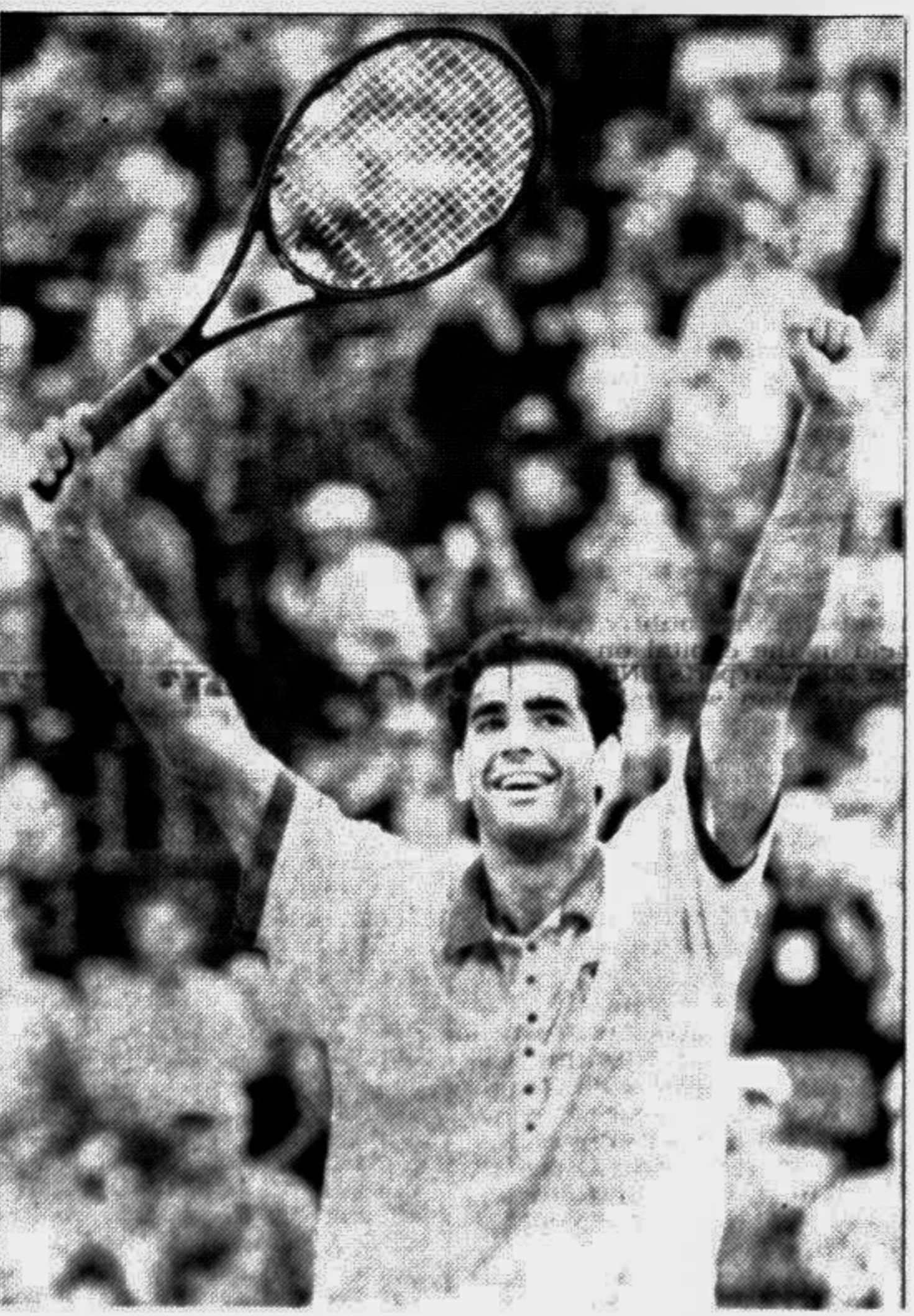
Sampras saved one more set point with an ace for 9-9 before Ivanisevic finally put together two points in a row.

The first couple of games in the fourth set, I couldn't believe I was still there," Sampras said. "I wasn't mad at myself. I was a little bit rattled. I couldn't believe what was happening."

Sampras finally got a decisive break for 5-3 in the fourth and served out for the match.

Ivanisevic, who had made it past the fourth round of the US Open for the first time in eight attempts, said he couldn't have done any more.

"I gave everything I could, and it was not enough," said Ivanisevic, who served 30 aces but couldn't convert any of his



Pete Sampras of the United States exults after his nerve-racking four-set victory over big-serving Croatian Goran Ivanisevic in the semifinals of the US Open at the Flushing Meadows, New York, on Sept 7. The world number one gritty American faces compatriot second seed Michael Chang in the final.

think I was the underdog," Chang said.

"He's won here and he has a winning record against me. I think that made me more relaxed."

Chang clinched victory with his 16th ace, but Agassi said it was his inability to punish Chang's second serve that really cost him the match.

"If I could have hurt his second serve early in the match, that would have had a big impact on his service games."

"I felt flat," he said. "I missed a lot of second serve returns. I felt like I was 40 per cent of the player that I have been. I never found my game."

The irony there is that Agassi had been searching for his game all year and thought it had been located in the Olympics, where he won the gold medal. On Saturday, at a most crucial time, it vanished again.

Agassi has been on an up-and-down ride all year.

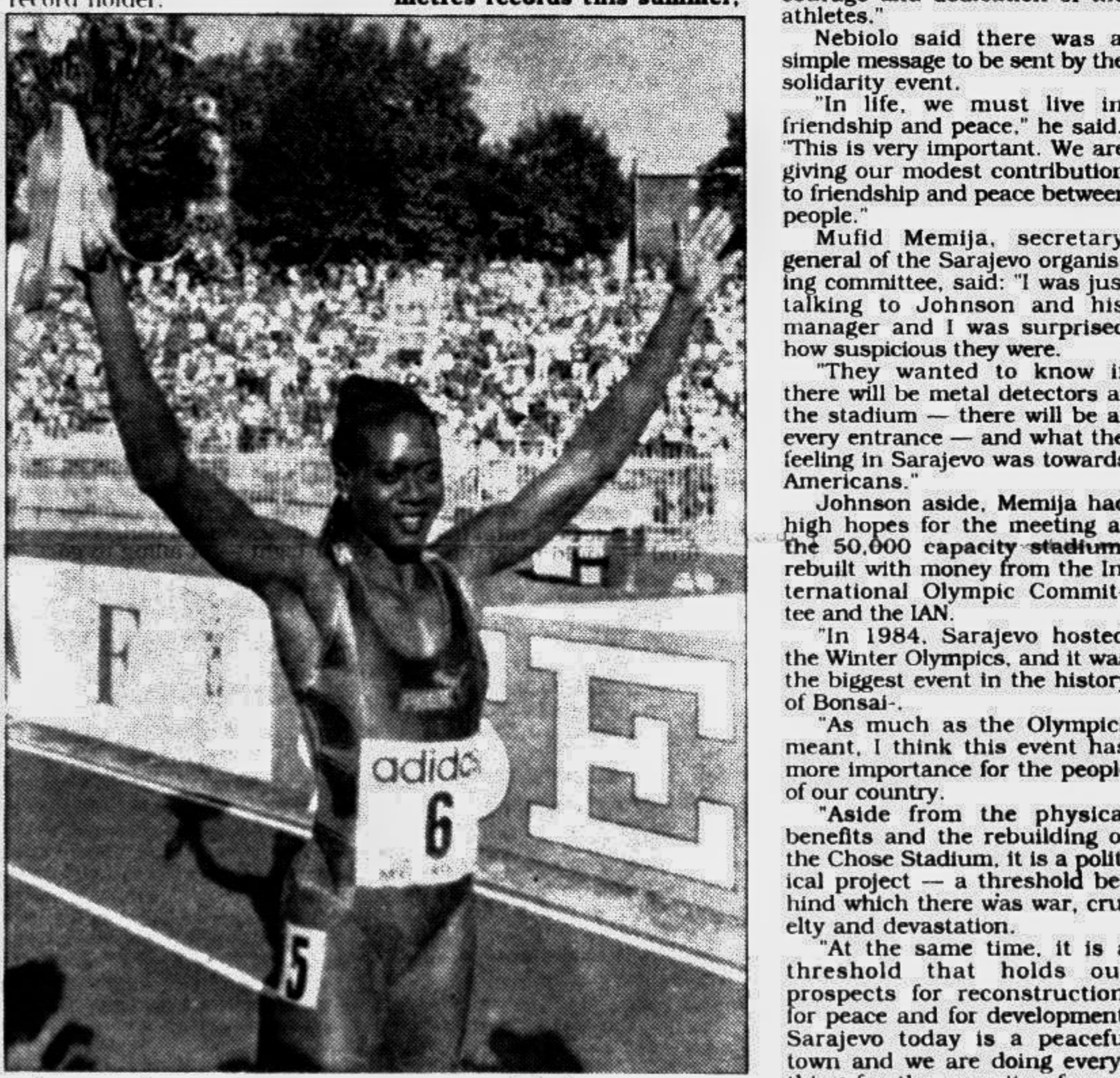
He played well in the Australian Open and at San Jose, California, then struggled losing to ordinary players like Luke Jensen at Memphis, Tennessee, Alberto Costa at Monte Carlo, Chris Woodruff in the French Open, Doug Flach at Wimbledon and Patrick Rafter at Washington.

Then in the Olympics, he swept to the gold medal, adding a new dimension to a career that already boasts three Grand Slam wins. He used the momentum from Atlanta to win a follow-up tournament in Cincinnati and seemed on top of his game at the Open.

And then in Saturday's semifinals, nothing.

"Not a great year," he said. "Olympic gold has added to my career. I can't feel bad about this year based on that alone. That doesn't mean that I don't feel I should have had a better year. I wanted to do much better in the Slams."

Agassi reached the semis at Australia but was out of the French Open in the second round and eliminated at Wimbledon in the first. The US Open was a significant improvement, but he was not able to sustain it.



Jamaica's evergreen sprinter Merlene Ottey acknowledges crowd's applause after winning 100 m at the IAAF Grand Prix in Milan on Sept 7. Ottey, now 36, recorded the second fastest time (10.74 seconds) on her way to win gold.

FBI keeping evidence under lock & key

ATLANTA, Sept 8: Information the FBI used to obtain search warrants in the investigation of the Olympic park bombing should remain sealed because the government "has no desire to spotlight anyone in the investigation," a federal prosecutor said Friday, reports AP.

Lawyers for Atlanta security guard Richard Jewell hand gone to court Tuesday to force the FBI to disclose the information.

The searches were conducted as Jewell became the focus of scrutiny by the international news media after law enforcement officials named him as a suspect.

US Attorney Kent Alexander on Friday filed the federal government's response, which also was sealed.

"This is an extremely complicated investigation, involving hundreds of witnesses around the country and thousands of pieces of evidence," Alexander said. "The government has no desire to spotlight anyone in the investigation until a defendant is named and charges are filed, and that is part of the reason for filing the response under seal."

Jewell was edited with finding the knapsack containing the bomb before it exploded early July 27, leading to two deaths and injuring 111. He emerged as a suspect three days later.

Jewell's lawyer wants to see sworn statements that led to warrants to search Jewell's apartment, his vehicle and a storage unit, and to pluck hairs from his head. He has asked for the government to show compelling reasons why the documents should be kept secret.

Numerous items were taken from Jewell's property, but he has not been charged in the bombing.

A brief filed with the motion seeking to unseal the documents said Jewell is interested in learning whether his constitutional rights were violated by an illegal search.

It was not immediately clear when the US District Court would rule.

THE US OPEN NOTEBOOK

IT'S MORE THAN A MERE FINAL

NEW YORK, Sept 8 (AP): The US Open men's singles final will determine the world's No. 1-ranked player.

If top-seeded Pete Sampras defeats Michael Chang to win his second straight title at the National Tennis Center, he will retain his No. 1 ranking.

By reaching the final, Chang, seeded second, has moved ahead of Austria's Thomas Muster, who was ranked No. 2 in the world. If he wins Sunday's title match, Chang would rise to No. 1, Sampras would drop to No. 2 and Muster would be No. 3.

HINGIS MAKES A MOVE

By reaching the semifinals, Martina Hingis of Switzerland will be No. 13 in the WTA Tour rankings when the computer-generated list is released Monday. It will be a career high for the 15-year-old.

To gain a quarterfinal berth, Hingis upset third-seeded Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of No. 7 Jana Novotna.

THE NERVELESS NUMBER ONE

Pete Sampras has been awarded the inaugural Heineken Star Award for the outstanding singles performance at the US Open, as voted

by the media.

Sampras earned the award for the grit, determination and ability to lift the level of his play in coming from behind to defeat Alex Corretja of Spain in their five-set quarterfinal match.

Tom Gullickson accepted the award on behalf of Sampras — a 5,000 dollars donation to the Tim and Tom Gullickson Foundation. The presentation was made by Michael Foley, president and chief executive officer of Heineken USA, prior to Saturday's semifinal matches. Gullickson also accepted a crystal star trophy that will go to Sampras.

WINNERS ALL

The four men's semifinalists who played Saturday have won 11 Grand Slam tournament singles titles among them.

Pete Sampras has won seven, including three US Opens. Andre Agassi has won three, including the 1994 US Open. Michael Chang's lone Grand Slam tournament triumph was at the 1989 French Open.

Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia has never won a Grand Slam singles title, although he reached the final twice, both times at Wimbledon in 1992 and 1994.

Klimsmann, who went unnoticed for most of the game, pounded Thomas Hessler's volley cross pass Polish goalkeeper Maciej Szczesny form about six metres out, just minutes from full time.

reached the men's singles semifinals without having to beat a seeded player.

Pete Sampras, Michael Chang and Goran Ivanisevic all had their road to the semis eased by upsets.

FERNANDEZ AWARDED

For her sportsmanship, manners and spirit of cooperation, Mary Joe Fernandez became the 11th recipient of the Sarah Palfrey Danzing Award at the International Club black-tie dinner this week.

Germany lord over Poland

ZABRZE (Poland), Sept 8: Germany easily beat Poland 2-0 on Wednesday in a friendly, their first match since their European Championship victory in June, reports Reuters.

Oliver Bierhoff, who scored a late equaliser and the winner against the Czechs in the Euro '96 final, headed in the game's first goal in the 28th minute from a floating centre pass by midfielder Christian Ziege.

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Norris, Trinidad defend crowns

LAS VEGAS, Sept 8: Terry Norris and Felix Trinidad did everything but please crowd.

Norris and Trinidad both defended their titles within the distance Saturday night, dominating their opponents in fights that could showcase a meeting between the boxers sometime next year, reports AP.

Both fights, however, ended with boos cascading from the crowd at the MGM Grand Garden, the majority of whom thought the referees acted too quickly in stopping the bouts against game but outclassed opponents.

"You're in here to fight until you die," Alex Rios protested after referee Mills Lane stopped his junior middleweight fight against Norris at 2:08 of the fifth round.

While Rios sank to his knees in protest after Lane moved in to stop the fight, Ray Lovato accepted his sixth-round loss to Trinidad with more resignation.

"I thought it was a stopped too soon and I thought I was winning," Lovato said. "But he's a good fighter. I take nothing away from him."

Norris hit Rios with almost every punch he had before a six-punch combination that put Rios into the ropes prompted Lane to step in and stop the fight.

Trinidad made it an even 30 in wins and a perfect 10 in title defenses by stopping Lovato at 1:57 of the sixth round to retain his IBF welterweight title.

History beckons Ferguson

LONDON, Sept 8 (AFP): For Alex Ferguson it is "the right challenge at the right time," a once-in-a-life time window of opportunity to put the seal of greatness on his managerial career.

Manchester United venture back into the Champions League against holders Juventus next week at last free from crippling shackles on selection and encouraged by home help.

Fergie knows he will never have a better chance to grasp the prize which will place him alongside the late Sir Matt Busby in the Old Trafford pantheon.

From next season, bizarrely, UEFA are prepared to extend invitations to club with pedigree but no title.

So the chance to become the last champions of champions is all the more enticing for a club whose soul has been inexorably entwined with this competition since the Munich air disaster of 1958.

Two nineties crusades have ended in the kind of humiliation which has become ritual for English clubs were once they dominated — eight triumphs before United first in 1968 and Liverpool's fourth 16 years later.

But Pat Crerand, a member of Busby's trailblazers says: "We will see the best of United this year — thanks to the Bosman ruling."

"It has become their holy grail, not just of Fergie but for all our supporters."

"Matt was just as obsessive about it, because if you win it you are the best."

He spent a long time pursuing it and when we did it against Benfica, well, think about you wildest dream, that's how we all felt. Elation unbounded. That's how Fergie and the boys will feel if they do it."

United are the flagship of renovated national pride, post Euro '96, but must negotiate a dangerous course via Vienna and, again, Istanbul. But the big rocks lurk next week in Turin.

The Italians have hazared their crown by scrapping the team that beat favourites Ajax last May in a 40 million pounds summer frenzy.

Rejects Gianluca Vialli and Fabrizio Ravanelli now face the English Premiership, conserstone defender Pietro Vierchowood has been sold to Perugia and midfielder Paulo Sousa to Borussia Dortmund while Sheffield Wednesday target Attilio Lombardo languishes in the reserves.

Executive vice-president Roberto Bettega goalscoring hero of the seventies had invested in what he hopes will be a more durable side for coach Marcello Lippi.

Croat striker Alen Boksic, French Maestro Zinedine Zidane and Uruguayan defender Paolo Montero, the son of seventies star striker Christened Vieri. And tycoon Gianni Agelli is still in pocket on the deals.

Ferguson admits: "They're a better team than last year, definitely Boksic is a top player and they've brought in Vieri (from Atlanta) who is a big, powerful forward. If anything he's improved their attack."

Their great quality is their power — they simply overpower Ajax, particularly in the first-half. There is a Britishness about them too. By next Wednesday I will make sure my players know exactly what they are facing."

United too, have new faces in Jordi Cruyff, Karel Poborsky, the Impresario Norwegian Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Ronny Johnsen.

This time only Roy Keane's recuperation should prevent them fielding their strongest

side, with French genius Eric Cantona having been cleared to play after it was originally thought he would be suspended.

In addition, each of England's cross-channel sides have been granted exemption to the third-round of the home Coca-Cola Cup. This could help prevent a repetition of last year's debacle.

That had less to do with talent and technique as tactics. United's win in the Cup Winners' Cup in 1991, repeated by Arsenal two years ago, proves the potential remains to restore a tradition which brought 22 trophies per-Heysel.

What happened during the exile is that the continental game moved on and few managers have had the appreciation of George Graham for the mordant approach needed to survive and prosper.

Frank Clark disciplined Nottingham Forest's approach last season, and it was no coincidence that he prospered where Kevin Keegan's gung ho Newcastle flopped, going against all their manager learned during his Liverpool heyday.

Clark says: "Our policy was not to go bull-at-a-gate against sides we knew would be adept at keeping the ball."

"We never panicked about winning our home games only by a small margin and we were prepared to defend as much as we needed, even at the City Ground. We were tight and disciplined and did ourselves proud."

"But there's no particular secret we just played to our strength and that as a long Forest tradition in Europe."

Just as in the pioneering days of the late fifties and sixties most clubs learn in the school of hard knocks even Graham's approach shaped by the Highbury lesson Benfica gave his side in 1991.