

Sport

Agassi, Courier give US 2-0 lead

INDIANAPOLIS, July 18: The United States picked the surface and Belgium paid the price in the opening singles matches of a Davis Cup quarterfinal match Friday, reports AP.

Andre Agassi became the third-winningest Davis Cup player in US history and Jim Courier also won to give the United States a 2-0 advantage in the best-of-5 series.

Agassi broke a tie with Bill Tilden and moved to within one victory of tying the late Arthur Ashe for second on the US list by topping Christophe Van Garsse 6-2, 6-2, 6-2.

Agassi, who is 19th in the ATP rankings after falling to 141st last fall, improved his Davis Cup record to 26-5.

In the opening match at the Indianapolis Tennis Centre, Courier beat Filip Dewulf 6-3, 7-6 (7-1), 2-7, 6-3.

The United States can extend its home winning streak to 18 series with a doubles victory by Richey Reneberg and Todd Martin on Saturday. The singles pairings will be reversed when the best-of-5 series ends on Sunday. The United States-Belgium winner plays Italy or Zimbabwe in the semifinals Sept. 25-27. Italy leads that series 2-0 and would travel to the United States if both teams advance.

Dewulf, who climbed past Courier to 43rd by reaching the semifinals of the Swiss Open last week, looked lost on the hard surface against Courier.

"I didn't feel really comfortable on this kind of surface," said Dewulf, whose best success on the tour has come on clay where he learned the game.

Dewulf hit more winners (42) than Courier (20), but unforced errors produced his undoing. He had 54 to Courier's 36.

"This is just not my kind of surface," he said. "I don't feel at ease on this surface. A lot depends on your return and serve. Those are not my favorite strokes of my game."

"I made a lot of unforced errors, especially on the service returns at important points." The match between Courier, who has never played on a losing Cup team in 11 previous times on the US team, and Dewulf was much closer than the score indicated. Courier had only a 123-117 advantage in points won.

"I played solidly," said Courier, who came back from a 2-1 deficit in sets to win the decisive fifth match against Russia in the opening Davis Cup round to get the United States into this series.

Courier, who had lost seven of his last eight matches this year, needed just 37 minutes to win the opening set as he overcame a 3-1 deficit when Dewulf had 20 unforced errors.

Van Garsse never got into the match against Agassi, who lost only one point while jumping to a 3-0 lead in the opening set and needed just 93 minutes to complete the match.

"He's not a hundred times stronger than me, not a thousand times, but a million times too strong for me," the 24-year-old Van Garsse said. "I couldn't imagine that somebody could play so fast on the ball and put so much pressure on me."

"It's tough to say if I played well or not, but I was really impressed."

"I felt like I was having to just kind of stay on top of him, stay controlled, stay inside of a myself," said Agassi, who had only 16 unforced errors, com-

pared to 37 by Van Garsse.

The United States has won more Davis Cup titles (31) and more Davis Cup matches (187) than any other country. It is 2-0 against Belgium, having prevailed 4-1 in 1953 and 3-2 in 1957.

In other quarterfinals, Germany and Sweden split their opening singles, as did Mexico and the Bahamas, while Spain leads Switzerland 2-0 and Italy leads Zimbabwe 2-0.

At Hamburg, Germany, Tommy Haas upset Jonas Bjorkman 6-3, 7-6 (7-4), 7-5 before Sweden's Thomas Enqvist evened the quarterfinal by sweeping Nicolas Pietrangeli 6-3, 6-3, 7-5.

"It's what we wanted from the singles," said Boris Becker,

head of Germany's Davis Cup team. "It leaves everything open."

At Guadalajara, Mexico, Alejandro Hernandez beat Roger Smith of the Bahamas, 6-3, 6-1, 6-3 and Mark Knowles of the Bahamas beat Luis Enrique Herrera 6-3, 1-6, 6-2, 6-2.

At La Coruna Spain, Carlos Moya and Alex Corretja won for Spain on clay courts. Moya, the French Open champion, beat 142nd-ranked Ivo Heuberger 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 and Corretja downed Marc Rosset 6-1, 6-2, 6-2.

At Prato, Italy, Andrea Gaudenzi and Davide Sanguinetti defeated Zimbabwe's Black brothers. Gaudenzi downed Wayne Black 6-3, 6-3, 6-4, then Sanguinetti took Byron Black 6-3, 6-3, 6-0.

Graf glides into semis

MAHWAH, New Jersey, July 18: Steffi Graf, playing her first match since losing in the third round at Wimbledon beat Mashona Washington 6-1, 6-4 in a quarterfinal match at the A and P tennis classic on Friday, reports Reuters.

Graf, who hasn't won a tournament this year after missing half of 1997 due to knee surgery took only 54 minutes to dismiss the American.

Graf, the number one player in the world before Martina Hingis took the top spot in March 1, 1997 is ranked 57th now. Washington is the sister of Malivi, a Wimbledon finalist in 1996 she is ranked 181.

"I felt good out there and never thought about my knee," Graf said. "I feel fine physically."

But she did show signs of her lack of activity, committing numerous unforced errors in the second set after a solid opening set that took only 23 minutes to complete. The result was never in doubt, although Washington managed a service break in the eighth game of the second set and then held in the ninth to take it 5-4.

But Graf powered an ace and two service points in the 10th game and closed it out two points later on a forehand approach that forced an error.

"I'll have to cut down more on the errors in my next match," said Graf, who will play number 42 Fang Li, China's top player in today's semifinals.

Capriati crashes

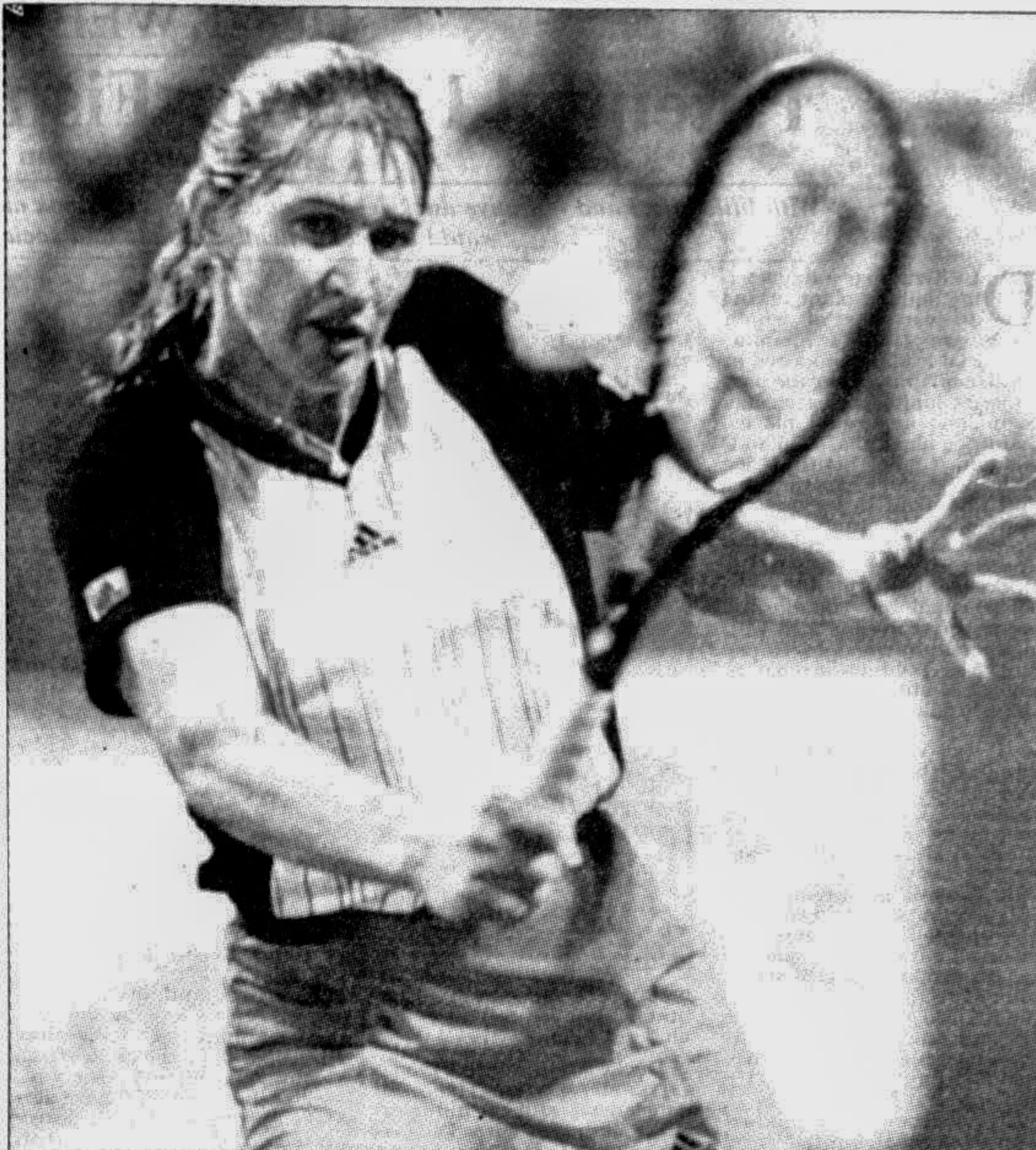
PALERMO, Sicily, July 18: Jennifer Capriati failed in the attempt to noticeably improve her WTA rankings as she was eliminated by unseeded German Barbara Rittner in the quarterfinals of the Palermo Grand Prix women's tennis tournament, reports AP.

The American player won the first set of Friday's match 6-2 but then lost the next 4-6, 2-6 to miss the chance of a semifinal berth in the 107,500 dollars competition on clay.

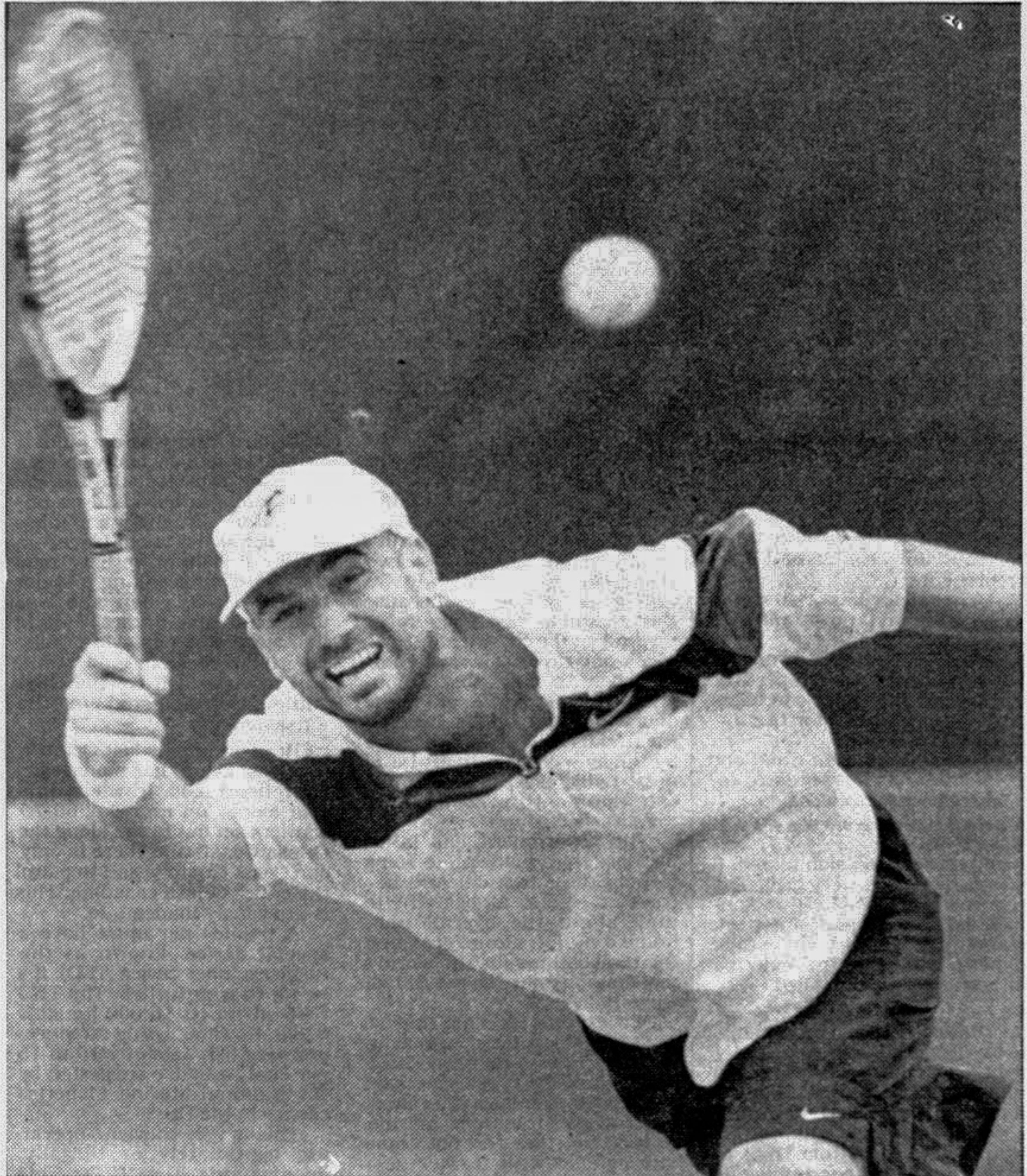
Rittner, No. 95 in the WTA rankings compared with Capriati's 133, takes on in Saturday's semifinal fourth-seeded Austrian Barbara Schett who struggled to a 4-6, 7-6 (7-3), 6-2 victory against Czech Radka Bobkova.

Sixth-seeded Miriam Oremans of the Netherlands also advanced into the semifinals, breezing past Germany's Elena Wagner 6-0, 6-2.

Top-seeded Patty Schnyder of Switzerland played Italian qualifier Maria Paola Zavagli in the last match of the day.



Steffi Graf of Germany executes a return during her match against Mashona Washington at the A and P Classic in Mahwah, New Jersey on July 17. Graf won 6-1, 6-4. — AP/UNB photo



American Andre Agassi in action against Christophe van Garsse of Belgium during their quarterfinal match of the Davis Cup in Indianapolis on July 17. — AFP photo

FIFA may turn unfriendly

GENEVA, July 18 (Reuters/Internet): Fans of the world's No. 1 sport may miss out on the next World Cup on television because the rights may be bought up by pay-TV companies, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) warned on Wednesday.

The Geneva-based EBU said the chances of everyone being able to watch the next tournament would be reduced because of FIFA's sale of the worldwide television rights for the 2002 and 2006 World Cups to the German sports marketing and media group Kirch for 2.8 billion Swiss francs (\$1.8 billion).

The World Cup is a unique perfect example of an event for the man on the street and should be available as a whole — all matches should be accessible on free-to-air channels," EBU Secretary General Jean-Bernard Munch said in a statement.

EBU, ignoring potential revenue from satellite, pay-per-view and cable viewers.

The EBU had bought the rights to the three World Cups from 1990 to 1998.

But in a change of policy, the world soccer body recently invited bids for the world television rights to the next two World Cups.

"FIFA had up to now always negotiated television rights with us. We are for public service and we don't have that much money," said EBU spokesman Jean-Pierre Julien.

"But FIFA apparently were tempted more by money than by the desire to promote their sport."

Feature

Devastating Wildfire to Hit California?

If you thought El Nino was bad, wait until his Pesky little sister La Nina hits the shore, says a Reuters report from Los Angeles.

Scientists believe that the weather phenomenon developing in the Pacific could spell disaster in southern California with a devastating wildfire season later this year.

They also think La Nina could bring an earlier hurricane season to the Mid-Atlantic and gulf states and another devastating drought in the Midwest and basket.

La Nina has a serious case of sibling rivalry with better-known El Nino, which drenched California from San Diego to San Francisco and northwards into the Wine Country last winter, bringing mudslides and misery.

The new phenomenon is a natural climate change associated with colder water temperatures in the Pacific around the equator. By contrast, El Nino is associated with warming of Pacific waters. Scientists estimate that 70 per cent of El Ninos are followed within a year by a La Nina.

La Nina, a so-called "cold episode" to meteorologists, is developing in an area some 2-1/2 times the size of California, where temperatures have already dropped several degrees below the normal 80 degrees F (26.6 C).

"It's possible this ocean cooling will stop," said Nick Graham of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. "But it looks like it will continue into the fall, giving us a moderate-to-strong La Nina," he recently told the Orange County Register newspaper.

"We're likely to feel the effects of La Nina for the next year," said Verne Kousky of the Climate Prediction Centre and Climatologist Bob Kirtman told Los Angeles TV station KNBC: "It looks like we're in for a relatively large La Nina."

Southern California, which was drenched last winter by El Nino-spawned rainstorms, could be in for an unusually dry, cold and windy autumn and winter (last winter) because of La Nina. And that means it could be one of the worst wild fire seasons because of the extra vegetation produced by last season's rains combined with increased Santa Ana winds whipping through tinder dry canyons.

California Fire Departments are already gearing up for a hot time on the firelines. "The grasses that grew from those rains (last winter) are already dead and the heavier vegetation will dry out by August or

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Such is the concern that climate researchers are meeting. This week in Boulder, Colorado to exchange findings in an effort to predict La Nina's mood in the next three months. "We hope to identify the current state of understanding of La Nina and its societal and environmental impacts," said Michael Glantz of the National Centre for Atmospheric Research.

Pooper-scooping Scientists Find DNA of Extinct Animals

Paul Recer writes from Washington

NEW from Science: A technique to extract DNA from 20,000-year-old dung. It can't be used to create extinct creatures like Hollywood scientists do with DNA in dinosaur movies, but it may solve mysteries about animals now gone forever.

"This is not Jurassic Park," said Hendrik N. Poinar, a University of Munich researcher. "It's more like Poop Park."

Poinar, a molecular biologist, led a team that discovered a chemical agent that will extract from ancient dung DNA fragments that come from the animal and from the food it ate.

The researchers, reporting Friday in the journal Science, said the technique has been used on dung from a giant American ground sloth that disappeared from the fossil record about 11,000 years ago. The dung was found in a Gypsum Cave in Nevada and was age dated at about 20,000 years.

The scientists are now using the same technique to search for DNA from manure thought to have come from some of the other 20 species of large animals that disappeared about the time humans first moved into the American continent about 11,000 years ago.

"Paleontologists have reached kind of a dead end in explaining why those animals went extinct," said Poinar. "I think the answer may be in the dung — the genetics of the dung."

Some other scientists said extracting DNA from ancient dung is an important advance in the study of animals gone forever.

"This adds several new dimensions to the study of ancient animals," Bob Wayne, an evolutionary biologist at UCLA, said in Science.

Poinar said that the extreme dryness of some caves in Arizona and Nevada preserved excrement for thousands of years, but it is difficult for scientists to determine which animals left the droppings.

With the new technique, he said, researchers will be able to identify the animals through their genetic structure. Cells from the animals' gut are sloughed off into the feces and these cells contain the DNA.

The studies also detect DNA from the plants the animals ate and from the parasites that tormented them. These studies, in turn, given clues about the climate that then existed.

Poinar said that when the giant sloth deposit dung 20,000 years ago, the climate near the cave was cool and wet because the animal fed on plants that

growing only under those conditions. Now the cave is in a dry, hot desert.

Poinar said his laboratory is now testing ancient manure, also called coprolites, that may have come from American mammoths and extinct mountain goats.

From caves in Gibraltar and in Spain, Poinar said there are coprolites that may have come from Neanderthal hominids that lived in Europe about 80,000 years ago. Extracting DNA from these specimens may help scientists understand how the ancient ancestors of modern humans migrated across Europe, he said.

Paul S. Martin of the University of Arizona in Tucson, a co-author of the study, said learning how to extract DNA from ancient dung "is a real breakthrough" that may provide final answers about why a complex group of large animals that lived in the Americas for hundreds of thousands of years suddenly disappeared when humans occupied the continent.

American animals that suddenly went extinct include the giant sloth, which was about the size of a black bear; the mastodon and mammoth, huge elephant-like animals; and the sabertooth cat. — AP

Racism Inquiry Called after Bar on Air Hostesses

Shailendra Yashwant writes from Mumbai, India

Africans studying in Asia often experience a rough ride. Stories of racism in China have emerged in the past. Now, reports Gemini News Service, an incident in India has thrown the spotlight on the problem there, and prompted hopes that negative stereotypes of blacks can be laid to rest.

A bar's refusal to admit two African women has caused an uproar over racial discrimination and focused attention on the prejudice suffered by many black people in India.

The National Human Rights Commission has asked local authorities to investigate the incident — which happened at the Leopold Restaurant in south Mumbai (formerly Bombay) in June — and report their findings by early August.

Leopold's, a celebrated backpackers' haunt, is described in the Lonely Planet tour guide as "one of Bombay's legends and a very popular place... for hanging around over a cold beer." But when two African air hostesses were invited by a drink in an upstairs bar there, they found the place less than welcoming.

After initial hesitation, the women took up the offer and walked up to the bar, but were turned away by the steward. When confronted, the restaurant owner, Roshid Dohmiri, is said to have shouted that he did not want "bloody Nigerians and Negroes" in his restaurant.

Dohmiri later expressed remorse for his outburst, saying his remarks were directed more towards the two men — who he described as being "fairly drunk" — than at the women. He referred to previous "indecent behaviour" in his restaurant, and said he did not want it to become known as "a pick-up joint".

The two men retaliated by contacting reporters. The story soon featured in the national headlines, with the media hitting out at racist behaviour, an issue rarely mentioned. Stories suddenly abounded about Africans being teased and abused in public places — from restaurants to police stations.

Such racial discrimination is all too familiar to the several thousand African students who study at institutions in India. They are often referred to pejoratively as "kaaliahs", "blackies" and "Negroes".

"I can't understand why the media are suddenly taking up the issue and doing the bleeding-hearts bit now, when they've always ignored our stories about African students being

ill-treated by the police," says PA Sebastian, a Mumbai-based human-rights activist who set up an African students' group after a Nigerian scholar, Dola Abiodun Tunde, was shot dead by officers of the city's drug squad.

Africans had staged a mass protest over the killing and complained about "deliberately biased application of criminal procedures, with excessive police torture", recalls Sebastian.

At the International Students' Hostel in south Mumbai, several Africans spoke about the prejudice they had encountered. A man called Frank, who preferred not to give his surname, said local children sometimes threw stones at him and his friends. A colleague, Darryl, who has been in India for four years, told of the time when he was wrongly arrested on drug charges and held for three nights.

Marianne, a young woman student, recalled a police attempt to charge her with prostitution after they picked her up when she was returning home from a late study session.

Maoshe, who married his Indian college girlfriend, said he did not like to walk with his wife in public because of the glares and insults they received when they were seen together.

Some human-rights activists blame much of the trouble on stereotypes generated by the local "Bollywood" film industry and the media, which often depict blacks as drug-runners or other criminals. Such biased portrayals are said to influence many police officers and even judges.

Sociologist and rights campaigner Sunanda Kelkar points out: "For a country that has a centuries-old history of discrimination on the basis of caste — a phenomenon that is rampant in most Indian cities even today — it is clear that Indians are very colour-conscious and quick to run down dark-skinned people, even when they are their own Indian brethren."

Her observations are borne out in the lonely-hearts advertisements in newspapers, many of which express a preference for "fair-skinned" partners. The fashion industry has also been accused of shunning darker models.

Another sociologist, Ashis Nandy, argues that Indians are not inherently racist, and blames prevalent stereotypes and "a lack of awareness about the African continent".

Whatever the truth, many African students are hoping that the media attention will result in positive awareness campaigns and help kill off the stereotypes. Student Frank said: "I hope my Indian brothers and sisters will find out that not all of us are criminals, like in the films, but in fact have a genuine admiration and affection for the country that is educating us on how to better things back home."

The writer is an Indian freelance journalist based in Mumbai who specialises in environment and development issues.

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Titanic Expedition, Once Again

For the second time in two years, Titanic explorers will try to coax the often cruel North Atlantic to release its 86-year-old grip on a hunk of the hull of the ill-fated oceanliner, says an AP report from St Johns, Newfoundland.

Discovery Channel Canada and RMS Titanic Inc. announced Thursday they have joined together again for a month-long expedition to the site off the coast of Newfoundland where Titanic hit an iceberg and sank.

The high-tech salvage operation, which begins Aug. 5, is only one part of a Canadian drive 7-million (US \$4.75 million) event timed designed to cater to public fascination with the Titanic following the Hollywood blockbuster.

On Aug. 16, Discovery will broadcast a two-hour programme live from the wreck, located about four kilometres (2.5 miles) below the surface.

It will feature a close look at the bow, the bridge, and an attempt to recover the ship's Marconi wireless transmitter.

In 1996, efforts to raise a section of the ship's hull measuring 6.5 by 4.0 metres (7.1 by 4.4 yards) failed when those involved could not hoist the piece from the surface of the water onto a ship.

Knowing now that the actual weight of the piece is 19 tons, RMS Titanic president George Tulloch said he is confident the salvage operation will be successful.

"We're more prepared this time because we've done it once before," Tulloch said from New York.

The piece of the hull will be lifted to the surface using diesel-filled bags.

It is to be brought to Boston for conservation before becoming part of a museum exhibition somewhere in Europe or the United States.

Scientists will also use new color digital still cameras to take 24,000 pictures of Titanic.

The 1996 expedition led researchers to conclude a series of small slits not a giant gash as many had long believed, ultimately sank Titanic.

RMS Titanic Inc. was granted sole legal salvage rights to the ship in 1994.

Ever since the wreck was discovered in 1985, there have been critics who have said the site should be treated as an underwater graveyard and left undisturbed.

Tulloch countered the criticism. "It is smarter to leave these ships like critically ill patients on the side of the road not to be cared for, or picked over by the ravages of scavengers who would pick them clean of things to sell at auctions?" asked Tulloch. "Or do people want to see them cared for by the best scientists in a permanent collection?"