

Readers' opinion

Why Brazil lost the Cup?—I

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This is the first part of a three-part article. Part II and III will be published tomorrow and day after.

NOTWITHSTANDING the world's greatest thrilling sport event — the World Cup Soccer 1998 concluded on July 12, its ramifications still persist this year in particular in the minds of soccer lovers the world over. Alarming number of reports and articles have been pouring in through international media from Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, London, Paris, Zurich or Milan on the horrible predicament of two-year FIFA player-of-the-year, Ronaldo on the day and the subsequent events leading to spectacularly aberrant performance of the superstars of four-time winner of the World Cup.

WHAT HAPPENED TO RONALDO AND THE TEAM?

If we arrange the series of event surrounding what happened to Ronaldo and to the Brazilian team on the day of final match, which has still remained a mystery, it stands like this.

The team doctor Lidio Toledo stated that Ronaldo felt dizzy after lunch, while press officer Nelson Borges said the player had vomited. According to an interview given to French daily Le Monde (July 16) by doctor Bernard Rogr who treated the player for about four hours, and reports emanating from other close sources, and around 2.00 pm, i.e. seven hours before kickoff Ronaldo suffered a convulsive fit for 40 seconds to one minute in which he was swallowing his tongue, that left his whole body in pain. Ronaldo's roommate defender Roberto Carlos ran into the hotel corridor shouting for a doctor. He and Ronaldo turned pale, began sweating and then suffered convulsion, with his arms flexed and hands almost deformed. Bebeto and Edmundo were the first to respond to his cry for help before doctors Lidio Toledo and Joaquim da Matta rushed to the spot. The hotel director Paul Chevalier stated that the staff and guests thought the talented maestro had died. There was general alarm with yells and shouts, which woke up other players from siesta. For a time people started shouting, "Ronaldo is dead, dead!" All these created a terrible atmosphere! This type of panic-ridden milieu can never be thought congruous for a game like World Cup final. On gaining consciousness, Ronaldo was taken on a stretcher, and driven to the Clinique des Lilas which he left at 7.50 pm and was rushed to the stadium (reaching only 45 minutes before kickoff). The hotel director said usually the players used to go to the stadium in midst of party atmosphere with singing and music, but after this incident, there was total silence in the bus as they started for the stadium on the day. "We, who knew that day's incident, understood that they were going to lose."

Coach Mario Zagallo prepared the first lineup with Edmundo replacing Ronaldo. At this the other players except Dunga, the captain of German parentage, declined to play. Further, president of the Brazil Football Confederation (CBF) Ricardo Teixeira summoned the high command of the Brazilian squad comprising coach Zagallo, co-ordinator/assistant coach Zico, general manager Americo Faria, team doctor Toledo and Marco Antonio Teixeira to an emergency summit in which he voiced concerns that team and federation sponsors Nike (the sportswear having a £250m four-year deal with Brazil) insisted that Ronaldo should play, and thus a decision was taken to reinstate Ronaldo in the final list issued only 40 minutes before the game. His fitness certificate was not, however, issued by the three French doctors who treated the player. Ronaldo's inner urge for 'winning the World Cup at all costs' also played so predominantly in his mind that despite doctor's no, he agreed to go on to the pitch when the coach asked him if he would be able to play. He was on

the horns of a dilemma—physical incapability on one hand, while impulsive dream of winning the Cup on the other. The 21-year hapless ace became a victim of circumstances. "Without Ronaldo, Brazil's gameplan was shot to pieces. Their confidence shattered by the thought of playing without a fit Ronaldo, the players lost the match before they stepped on to the field", Gavin Hamilton revealed the inner predicament of the team in World Soccer (London, Aug '98). Ronaldo told the National Globo Television that he feared for his life at the time of the attack during which he was reportedly swallowing his tongue. "It was a tremendous scare. We lost the World Cup but I won another cup — my life," he revealed. "I don't remember properly but I went to sleep and then as the doctor said, I had a fit. I woke up then and my whole body was in pain." Zagallo disclosed in a post-match press conference, "Ronaldo was not really fit to play tonight. The trauma was very great. We gave up the line-up without Ronaldo, and that rattled our team psychologically. They were stymied, inhibited because Ronaldo was not going to play" (quoted by Oliver Holt in "The Times, London, July 14, 1998). Thus a sick Ronaldo, the best striker of the world, was found groggy and sluggish in the field because of tranquilliser administered after the convulsion, and was far away from his usual form. His performance was thus incredibly meek, which further frustrated other players. The forward playmakers even avoided giving him passes. Mostly he was found standing around the French penalty box in a pensive mood as a mute spectator. Tim Vickery ran an appropriate headline, "the breaking of one man broke the team..." in Independent (London, July 19). He admitted on arriving Milan (Aug 20) that "the team was of rare quality but his illness had affected the match result". The result was thus unbelievable that happened. "This was probably Brazil's worst performance" in World Cup history since 1966, asserted Brian Glanville (The Times, July 14). The former coach Carlos Alberto Parreira bemoaned, "It was our worst World Cup display ever", quoted Andrew Warshaw in Independent of July 19. Diogo Moura, an editor of a Brazilian sports daily Lance exclaimed (July 25), "this is going down as one of the eternal mysteries in football history." In a front page editorial the Correio Brasiliense daily (Brasilia) reprinted, "Zagallo and Toledo committed the most heinous, howling and unjustifiable mistake of their lives" in playing a sick and unfit Ronaldo.

CAUSES OF CONVULSION

There are conflicting reports from doctors and Ronaldo's

close sources about the causes of convulsion. It may be due to one or combination of a few factors, i.e. (a) severe fatigue, weariness and strain, (b) allergic shock, (c) ankle injury and tendonitis in knee for which he had to take painkilling injection Vicodin before every match which was not working in the end because of comparative Romario factor), (d) food toxication, (e) epileptic fit, (f) brawl with fiancée Brazillian model Susana (or, Susannah or, Suzana) Werner over impending breakup of relationship; there was rumour that Ronaldo discovered shortly before the final that Miss Werner had been socialising, at the time of his being in the training camp, with a Globo employee causing his physical and emotional distress (David Miller in The Daily Telegraph, July 14), (g) series of enticing telephone calls from female fans, (h) psychological reaction due to tremendous international pressure on him pouring through increasing newspaper reports and movie phone calls either urging him to win the match or warning that his form was fading. Contentions at (f) and (h) can be corroborated by the statements of his roommate Roberto Carlos, who said, "I have a wife, family and children... but he doesn't have that. He doesn't have the support you need... He's under more pressure than anybody else in the world and all that's happened today has left him very distressed." Further, Ronaldo admitted (July 13) that "newspaper reports on the demands set on him to win the game had been playing on his mind, particularly the suggestion that he was fading as a player." But were these enough to cause any convulsion and Brazil's abject performance or, was there something more serious to the story?

THE 4 QUESTIONS: FAR MORE TO THE STORY

Brian Homewood, who was close to the Brazilian squad in Paris went to Brazil after the final to interview the squad members. His report captioned, "Ball of confusion" published in the September issue of World Soccer has generated many questions and ingredients to unveil the mystery which has mired, paralyse and confused the people for what really happened to Ronaldo and his team leading to such incredibly ineffective performance on July 12. Homewood has asked four vital questions. If we add some missing ones and answer them systematically we could be close to the truth, if not the whole truth.

1. Did Ronaldo suffer something more serious such as an epileptic fit? What caused it in the first place? — People acquainted with a chronic disease know that it is a chronic disease of the nervous system. It occurs periodically and may cause convulsion. Epileptic patients sometimes behave ab-

normally, and utter abnormal words. But does Ronaldo suffer from a chronic disease? Did such symptoms occur earlier also? The answer might be in the negative. Homewood has not, however, asked other very related questions viz. why the convulsion occurred just after lunch? Why a young person of 21 with good health should have vomited? Was there any gastroenterological problem? Was the sample of vomit pathologically examined to exclude food toxication? Why was he swallowing his tongue? Is there any disease in which a patient does so and which may have resemblance with Ronaldo's incident?

2. Was there a players' rebellion in the dressing-room before the game over whether Ronaldo should play or not? — In the emergency meeting of the squad in the dressing-room there was apparently a furor, if not a complete rebellion, amongst the players. The refusal to warm up on the pitch before the match was obviously because of the same furious row, which was another crucial factor that brought disunity and discord amongst the players who were palpably found indifferent, apathetic and ambivalent in the game. Many soccer correspondents have described this act as "the first final lost in the dressing room."

3. Does Ronaldo's illness really explain Brazil's incredibly apathetic and ineffective performance? — Not exactly. "Apathetic" performance is related to the answer of question # 2 as also 4 below. The dissatisfaction and discord amongst the players emerging from the row were the cause of apathy which was demonstrated in their performance, as if the game was thrust on them against their will, so most players did not take the responsibility of the match result. Ronaldo's illness and Romario's absence caused partly ineffective performance of the team.

4. Was there something more sinister at work? — Most people believe so. If we cohere here the scattered versions of Roberto Carlos, Bebeto and other soccer specialists, it will provide an answer to this question, which still remained a mystery. Gavin Hamilton left a concluding remark, "We may never know the full story" (WS, Aug '98). Homewood's conviction is not without foundation when he says that the story so far given to believe is the officially agreed pact after the game, while the Brazilians remain convinced that there is far more to the story. Bebeto and Roberto Carlos' indication to intrigue, followed by the statement, "One day, you'll know what happened," and further, the latter's charge.

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Kuerten ousts Muster

MALLORCA, Spain, Oct 3 (Reuters/Interfax). Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten booked his place in the final of the Mallorca Open on Saturday with a scrappy 7-5, 7-5 victory over Thomas Muster.

The fifth-seeded Austrian had chances to get back into the match in the second set, breaking the Kuerten serve twice but both times failing to hold on to his own.

Kuerten, the 1997 French Open champion and eighth seed, then saved two break points at 5-5 with aces.

A piece of good fortune enabled the Brazilian to wrap up the match in the next game.

Kuerten set up two match points with a backhand pass and converted the second thanks to a mishit forehand that just clipped the line.

Kuerten will face either Carlos Moya or fellow Spaniard Fernando Vicente in Sunday's final.

Greg, Jan advance

TOULOUSE, France, Oct 3: Top-seeded Briton Greg Rusedski and second-seeded Dutchman Jan Siemerink on Friday breezed into the semifinals of the 400,000 dollar ATP Tour event here, reports AFP.

Rusedski brushed aside the challenge of Frenchman Arnaud Clement and Siemerink ousted Swiss player Roger Federer — both winning in straight sets.

Big-serving Rusedski, 14th in the latest ATP Tour rankings, downed 20-year-old Clement 6-4, 6-1, taking just 56 minutes to advance.

Clement never recovered his composure after dropping his opening service game. Canadian born Rusedski finished the match by winning six straight games.

Siemerink struggled in the first set against 17-year-old Federer before prevailing 7-6 (7-5), 6-2.

Federer, the Wimbledon Junior champion playing in only his second ATP Tour event, underlined both his talent and lack of experience as he played impressively but lost the key points.

The top four seeds all advanced to the semis with third-seeded Thomas Johansson of Sweden beating Frenchman Stephane Huet 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 and fourth-seed Nicolas Pietrangeli of Germany downing Marc Rosset of Switzerland 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.

Rusedski now plays Kiefer with Siemerink up against Johansson.

Barada clinches Al-Ahram title

CAIRO, Oct 3: Ahmed Barada, a 21-year-old Egyptian former world junior squash champion, won his first title in a super Series tournament on Friday night when he beat the surprise finalist from Scotland, Martin Heath, in a 98-minute final of the Al-Ahram International, reports AFP.

For a player ranked 21st in the world, Heath put up a tremendous struggle and Barada had to quell a tremendous late recovery by the Scot — from 5-10, to 13-11 — to win 15-7, 15-11, 15-11, 13-15, 15-13.

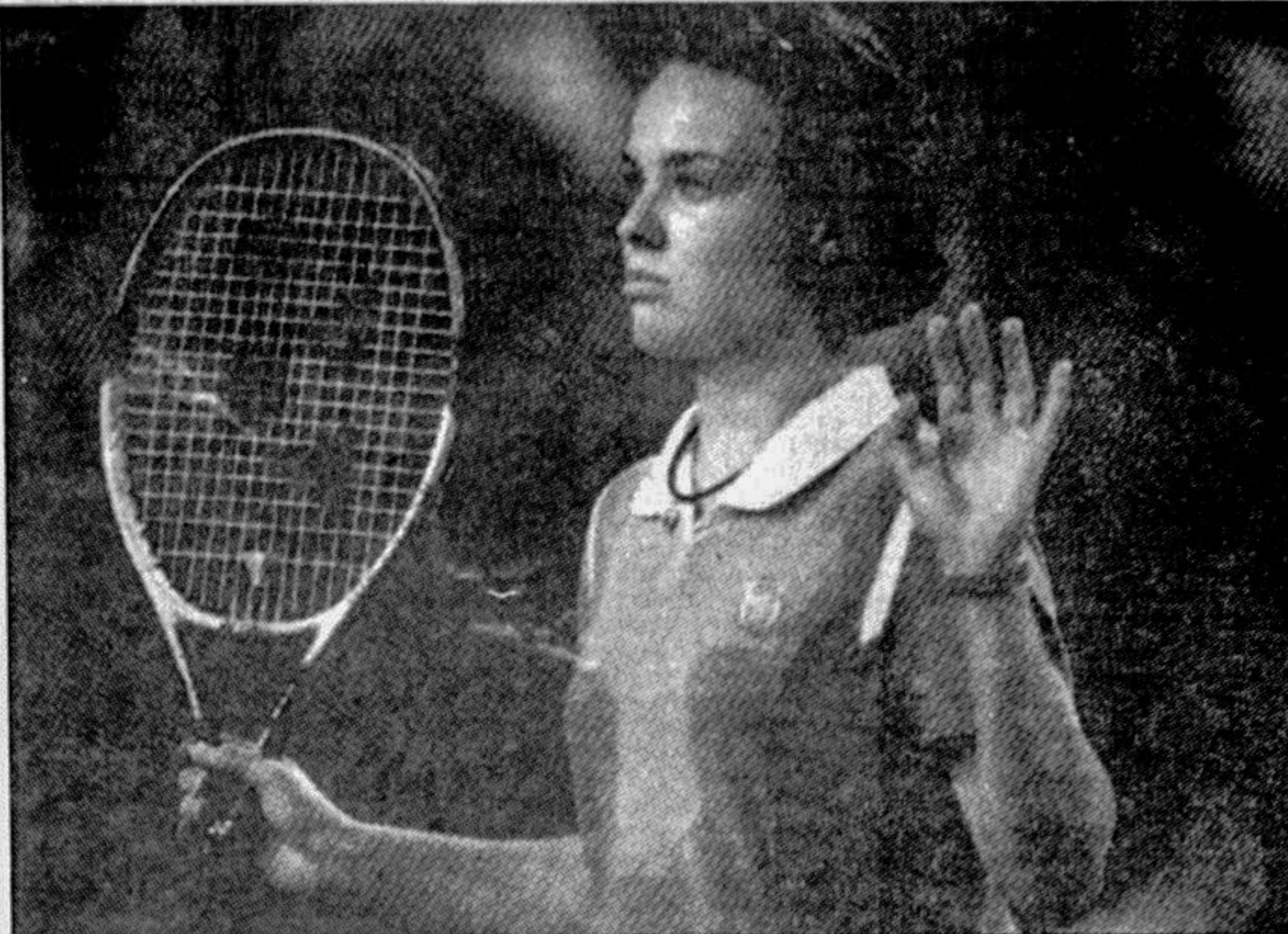
Michelle Martin of Australia scored her sixth successive major victory when she defeated England's Cassie Jackman 9-5, 9-3, 9-2 in the women's final.

Sheikh Russell chess Oct 13

Russel Jatiya Shishu Kishore Parishad will organise a chess competition on October 13 and a painting competition on October 16 in celebrations of the 34th birth anniversary of Sheikh Russel, youngest son of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, reports BSS.

A press release of the Parishad yesterday said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to distribute prizes among the participants on October 18 in the Osmany Memorial Auditorium.

Forms will be available from 10 am to 10 pm at the central office of the juvenile organisation at 23 Bangabandhu Avenue from October 5.



World number one Martina Hingis reacts during her Grand Slam Cup semifinal clash against Patly Schnyder in Munich on Friday. Hingis quit the match due to injury in the third set.

Williams, Schnyder set for a showdown

MUNICH, Oct 3 (Reuters/AP): American Venus Williams outpowered Wimbledon finalist Nathalie Tauziat of France to set up a final with Swiss Patty Schnyder at the Grand Slam Cup on Friday.

Williams, who had lost to Tauziat in both their previous encounters, was in a class of her own this time, cracking down five aces and committing few unforced errors on her way to a comfortable 6-4, 6-0 victory.

She will now face Schnyder, who saw world number one Martina Hingis pull out with cramp at 5-5 in the deciding set of their all-Swiss semifinal.

"There was not much point in going on and risking an injury," said Hingis.

Hingis had won the first set 7-5, while Schnyder took second, also 7-5 in the first showdown between the two Swiss teenagers.

In the third, Hingis raced to a 5-1 lead and held match point at 5-3, but she netted a backhand to waste it. She also questioned two calls that went against her as she dropped her serve.

Schnyder held serve to come within a game of equaling the score. During the changeover,

Hingis had her thighs massaged by trainer.

Back on court, she had trouble running as Schnyder hit the corners. Hingis quickly lost the game and with the score at 5-5, she retired, after two hours and 11 minutes.

"I think I would have won those two games, but it's true, she retired and I didn't really win it," Schnyder said.

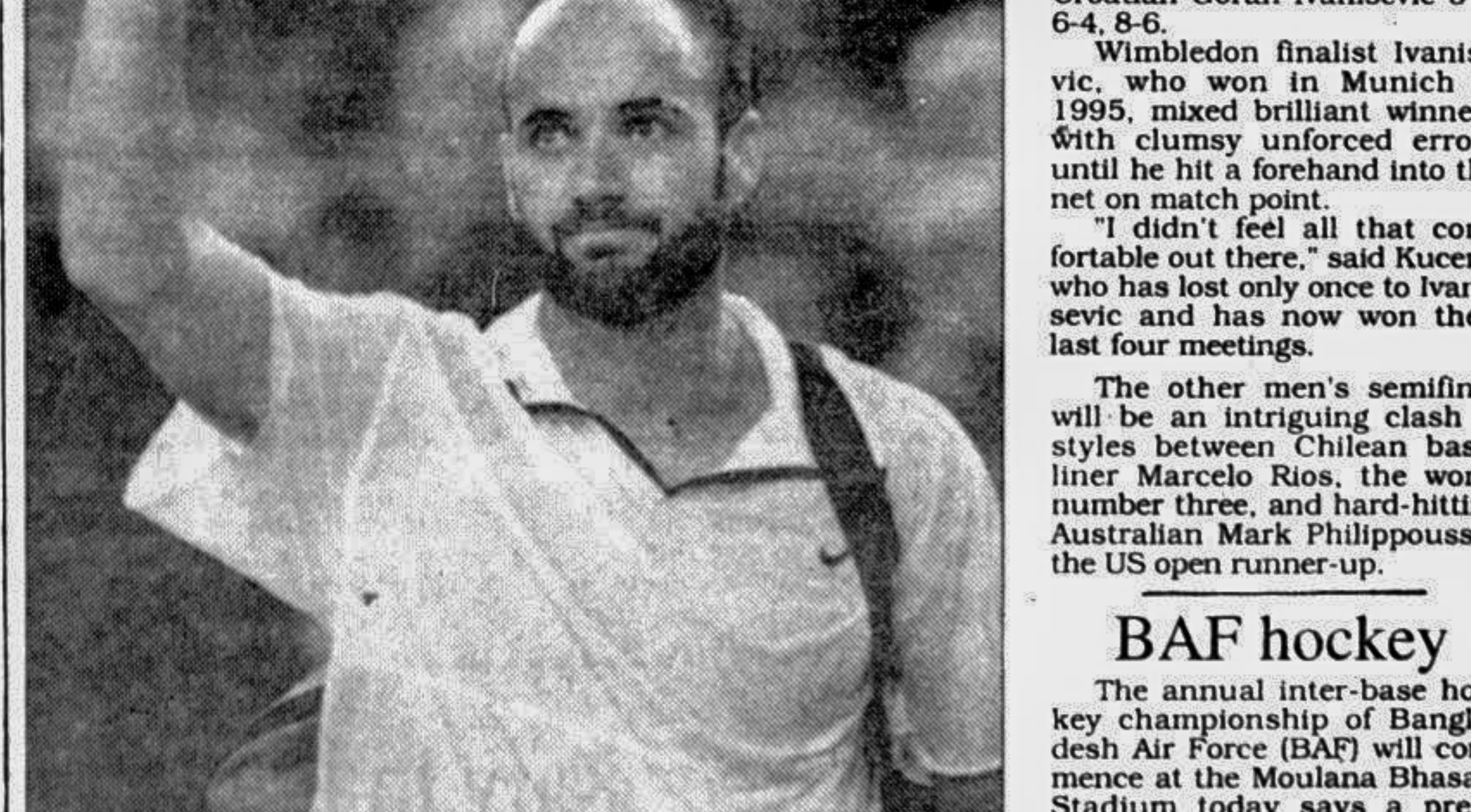
"In a regular tournament or in a Grand Slam, she would have played those last two games, even at the risk of a major injury," Schnyder said. "But this is not a tournament where you can win points and she's got a few tournaments coming up where she has the defend her No 1 position."

Hingis turned 18 on Wednesday, while Schnyder, ranked No 9 in the world, is 19. The two played in the Fed Cup final loss to Spain.

Hingis said she also cramped in the Fed Cup against Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, although she won that match.

"I haven't had enough time to recover since the US Open, but I also have to work on my fitness," she said.

Next week, Hingis is scheduled to play in Filderstadt, Germany, where she could lose the top ranking to Lindsay Davenport.



American Andre Agassi acknowledges the crowd's applause after defeating Petr Korda of Czech Republic in the Grand Slam Cup quarterfinal on Friday. Agassi reached the last four with a 4-6, 6-0, 6-1 victory.

After winning three of the four Grand Slam tournaments last year (Australian Open, Wimbledon and US Open) and reaching the final of the French Open, Hingis captured only one this year — the first one in Australia.

Since then, Hingis has won only three more titles, at Indian Wells, Hamburg and Rome, and she lost the US Open final to Davenport, her third loss to the American this year.

Including the Fed Cup, Hingis singles record this year is now 60-11.

By reaching the final, Schnyder made sure of earning at least 400,000 dollars and would get 800,000 dollars for winning the event on Sunday.

Hingis got 200,000 dollars, plus a 100,000 dollar bonus for her Australian Open title.

Andre Agassi extended his impressive run in the men's tournament by beating Australian Open champion Petr Korda in Friday's quarterfinals.

Agassi, who had white-washed Frenchman Cedric Pioline in his opening match, relied on blistering returns and powerful groundstrokes to tame Czech Korda 4-6, 6-0, 6-1.

"I'm pleased because Korda is not an easy player to play against and I did what I needed to do," he said.

Agassi, a wild card, dropped his serve to lose the first set but then went on a roll, winning the next eight games.

Korda's double-fault at match point was typical of his performance: 16 double-faults and 39 unforced errors.

The former world number one will now meet Karol Kucera for a place in Sunday's final.

Slovakia's Kucera, who beat Agassi in five sets in the fourth round of this year's US Open, won a gripping battle with Croatian Goran Ivanisevic 5-7, 6-4, 8-6.

Wimbledon finalist Ivanisevic, who won in Munich in 1995, mixed brilliant winners with clumsy unforced errors until he hit a forehand into the net on match point.

"I didn't feel all that comfortable out there," said Kucera, who has lost only once to Ivanisevic and has now won their last four meetings.

The other men's semifinal will be an intriguing clash of styles between Chilean baseliner Marcelo Rios, the world number three, and hard-hitting Australian Mark Philippoussis, the US open runner-up.

BAF hockey

The annual inter-base hockey championship of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) will commence at the Moulana Bhasani Stadium today says a press release.

Air officer commanding of the local airbase Air Commodore Fakhrul Azam will inaugurate the seven-day meet.

The Daily Star TV Guide

Table with TV channel logos (BBC, CHANNEL [V], STAR PLUS, PTV-2, ZEE INDIA TV, MTV INDIA) and their respective program schedules for Sunday, October 4th.

Table with program categories (Romance Matinee, MUSIC ASIA, DD 7, DD CHANNEL-1, ZEE TV, SONY TV) and their respective program schedules.

Table with program categories (shippard, 9:30 Star, 11:30 Series, DD METRO, DD INT'L, STAR WORLD, AIN) and their respective program schedules.

Table with program categories (11:30 Series, 12:30 Series, 1:30 Series, 2:30 Series, 3:30 Series, 4:30 Series, 5:30 Series, 6:30 Series, 7:30 Series, 8:30 Series, 9:30 Series, 10:30 Series, 11:30 Series, 12:30 Series) and their respective program schedules.