

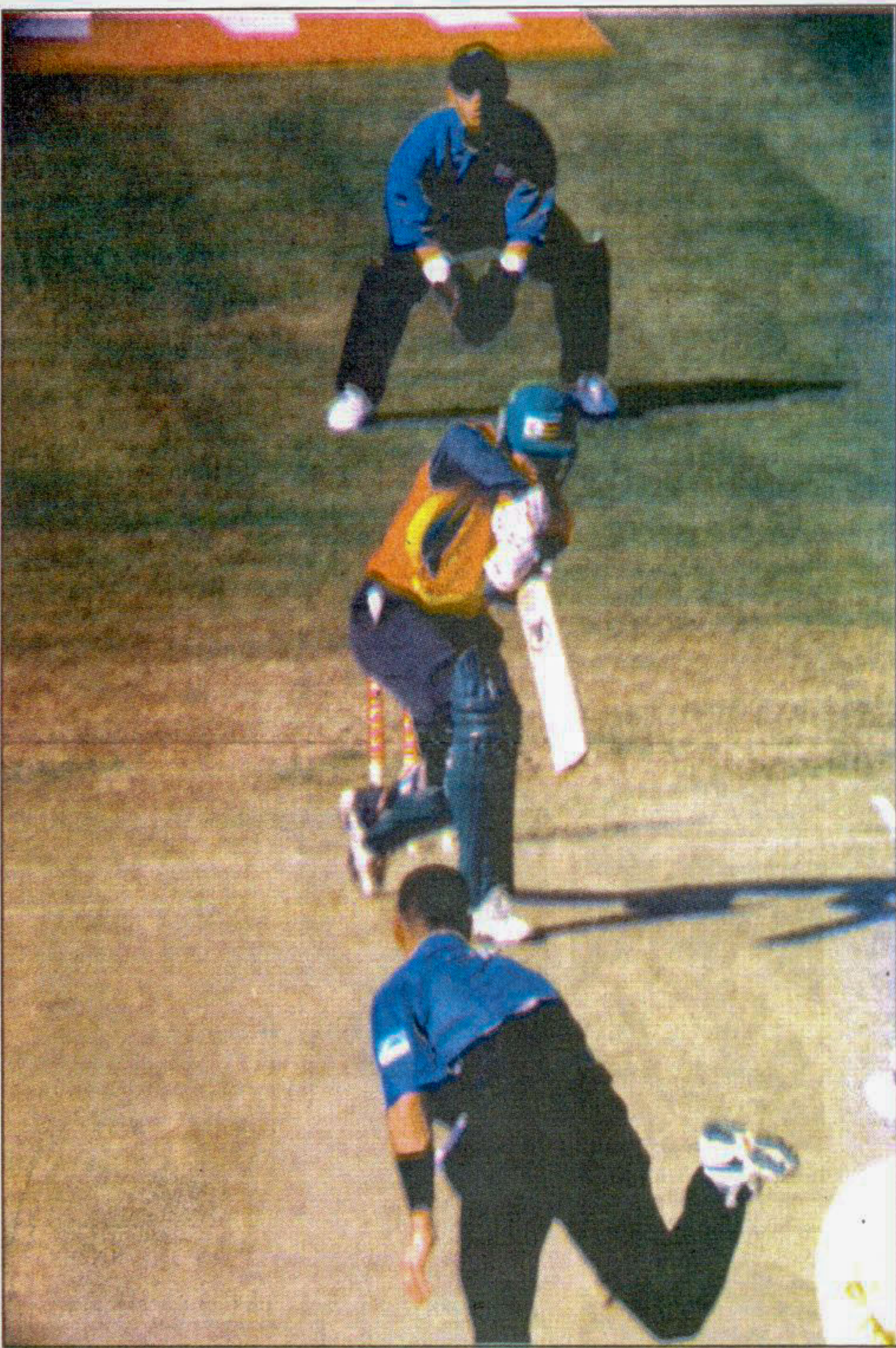
Balloons, buddies, bails, the batsman and the babies: at the Bangabandhu on Saturday



Zimbabwean players wait with coloured balloons before start of the tourney.



Stephen Fleming and Alistair Campbell shake hands after the toss



In the firing line Andy Flower



The two captains with Barry Richards (left) — Star photos by A K M Mohsin and Anisur Rahman



Enthusiastic youngsters asking for sixes

Olympic torch relay begins in Uluru

SYDNEY, Oct 24: The Australian leg of the Olympic torch relay will begin its 100-day journey at Uluru in the dead heart of the country, Olympics Minister Michael Knight said here today, reports AFP.

The torch will be flown in from Papua New Guinea on June 8, 2000, more than three months before the start of the Sydney Games.

Commonwealth Games gold medalist sprinter Nova Peris-Kneebone will be the first torch bearer and it will also be carried around the base of Uluru, formerly known as Ayer's rock near Alice Springs, by representatives of the traditional owners.

"Uluru is not only known worldwide, but is also a place of immense historical and cultural significance," Knight said.

Knight was flanked by traditional Aboriginal owners of Kata Tjuta National Park, which encompasses Uluru, as he made the announcement.

"Lots of areas had legitimate claims for the starting point but what better symbol of national unity could there be than to go to the very centre of our country," Knight said.

"It, in the geographical heart of Australia, is of great spiritual significance to many Australians and is part of the out-back character of Australians."

The Olympic torch will be taken to all of Australia's states and territories on its route, which is designed to pass within one hour's drive of up to 93 per cent of Australia's 18 million population.

Games organisers have guaranteed that 75 per cent of the 10,000 torch bearers or 2,500 escort runners will be members of the Australian public with the remainder consisting of sponsors and officials.

Real, Milan convinced



GENEVA, Oct 24: Real Madrid and AC Milan threw their support behind UEFA's plans for a revamped Champions' League on Friday after another meeting between 12 of Europe's top clubs and their governing body, reports Reuters.

Real and Milan, who had shown only lukewarm interest when UEFA unveiled their response to Media Partners' 'super league' plans earlier this month in Lisbon, said they intend to work with European soccer's governing body in developing the new 32 team format.

The 12 clubs, most of which have been targeted by Milan-based sports marketing group media partners to form a super league, had requested the meeting with UEFA in order to express their ideas and concerns.

They had met with UEFA on October 14 when they demanded more control over the organisation of the Champions' League and insisted on having more in out in financial matters.

And what had appeared to be

a large divide between UEFA and the clubs was quickly bridged, both sides leaving Friday's three-hour meeting very much on the same page.

"It is surprising the footwork that has been done by UEFA," said Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz. They met our concerns to a large degree.

"Not just Real Madrid's concerns but all clubs the same way."

Most clubs expressed the same sentiments, Bayern Munich's vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge summing up the meeting as, "positive" while his AC Milan counterpart Adriano Galliani, said he was, "quite impressed."

"They outlined certain projects we can support and addressed concerns about things we expressed," added Galliani.

Ajax, Amsterdam, Borussia Dortmund, Inter Milan, Juventus, Liverpool, Manchester United, Olympique Marseille, Porto and Real Madrid were also represented at the meeting.

Obtaining the support of the leading clubs that would form the nucleus of any proposed 'super league' is a major victory for UEFA.

The clubs and UEFA refused to reveal details of specifics about what was discussed, although UEFA general secretary Gerhard Aigner did admit to presenting each team with a computer programme outlining income projections.

UEFA have still to release details of the financial arrangements, while Media Partners have talked about a figure of 1.2 billion dollars.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson was in defiant mood. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the annual congress of the German Soccer Federation (DFB) in Wiesbaden, he said: "UEFA and the world governing body will never accept a private league."

"I am confident that UEFA's plans to reform European club competitions will receive wide support."

Both side acknowledged there are still several areas that require further discussion but that they are willing to compromise in order to come to an agreement.

Testud upsets Martinez



MOSCOW, Oct 24: France's Sandrine Testud pulled off one of her most significant wins this year by ousting third seed Conchita Martinez of Spain 7-6, 7-5 in the Kremlin Cup quarterfinals of Friday, reports Reuters.

Fifth seed Mary Pierce of France survived a tough test against unseeded Spaniard Magui Serna to win 7-5, 6-3, while American first and second seeds Venus Williams and Monica Seles trounced Katarina

Studenikova and Silvia Farina respectively.

In a compelling two-hour match, seventh seed Testud overcame a brief loss of concentration in the second set to prevail over Martinez.

It's a very important win for me because I had never beaten her before and it should give me a lot of confidence for the future," Testud said.

After winning the first set in a tiebreaker 7-4, the Frenchwoman trailed 5-3 before taking the last four games. "I didn't give up and was just

trying to keep my focus and keep playing," she said. "She also had three set points on her serve in the 10th game but I came back and won."

Martinez, who won this tournament two years ago, played well in the first set but struggled after injuring her right foot in the eighth game of the second set.

The Spaniard saved three match points in the final game but then double faulted and hit a backhand into the net on the last play.

2008 Olympic Games Malaysia serious about bidding

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 24: Malaysia is making a serious bid to play host to the 2008 Olympic Games, a senior sports official said Thursday, reports AP.

Deputy Sports Minister Loke Yuen Yow told Parliament a special committee had been formed to study whether Malaysia could stage the world's biggest sporting event, the national news agency Bernama reported.

He said local sports officials would visit the International Olympic Committee headquarters in Switzerland next month to study bidding procedures and seek advice from Olympic board members.

"If we can successfully organise the Commonwealth Games, I believe we can also organise the Olympic Games," Loke said, referring to the 10-day event Malaysia staged last month for 360 million ringgit (95 million dollars).

The Commonwealth Games committee said earlier it expected to make a profit of 5 million ringgit (1.5 million dollars) after building and upgrading sports arenas, including the main stadium, which cost 300 million dollars to build.

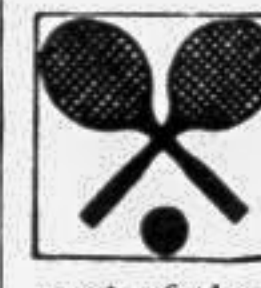
The infrastructure is mostly in place and only minor upgrading to Olympic standards would be needed, Loke said.

He acknowledged profits from staging such an event would be minimal, but said the Olympics would burnish the country's image and boost tourism.

Such sporting events would also enhance "the feeling of patriotism which important to racial unity" in multi-ethnic Malaysia, he said.

Malaysia is making a bid to stage the Asian Games in 2006.

Pete pulls out, Pat ousted



LYON, France, Oct 24: The chances of Chilean Marcelo Rios taking over the world number one spot by the end of the year received a boost on Friday when injury hit his two main rivals, Pete Sampras and Patrick Rafter, reports Reuters.

American world number one Sampras pulled out of his

match against German Tommy Haas, while world third ranked Rafter of Australia, hampered by a muscle strain, went down in two sets to unseeded South African Wayne Ferreira, 6-4, 6-1.

Sampras withdrew because of a back injury which had troubled him since his three-set match against compatriot Todd Martin on Wednesday.

"I started to feel the pain

when I served during the first set of the match against Todd. I didn't feel like going on like this," Sampras said.

Sampras left for Stuttgart on Friday where he plans to rest for three days before entering the German event.

He said he decided to withdraw to avoid spoiling his chances of retaining the world number one spot at the end of the year for a record sixth successive time.

Sampras is leading the ATP ranking with a comfortable advantage over Rios and Rafter but he also has more points to defend than them.

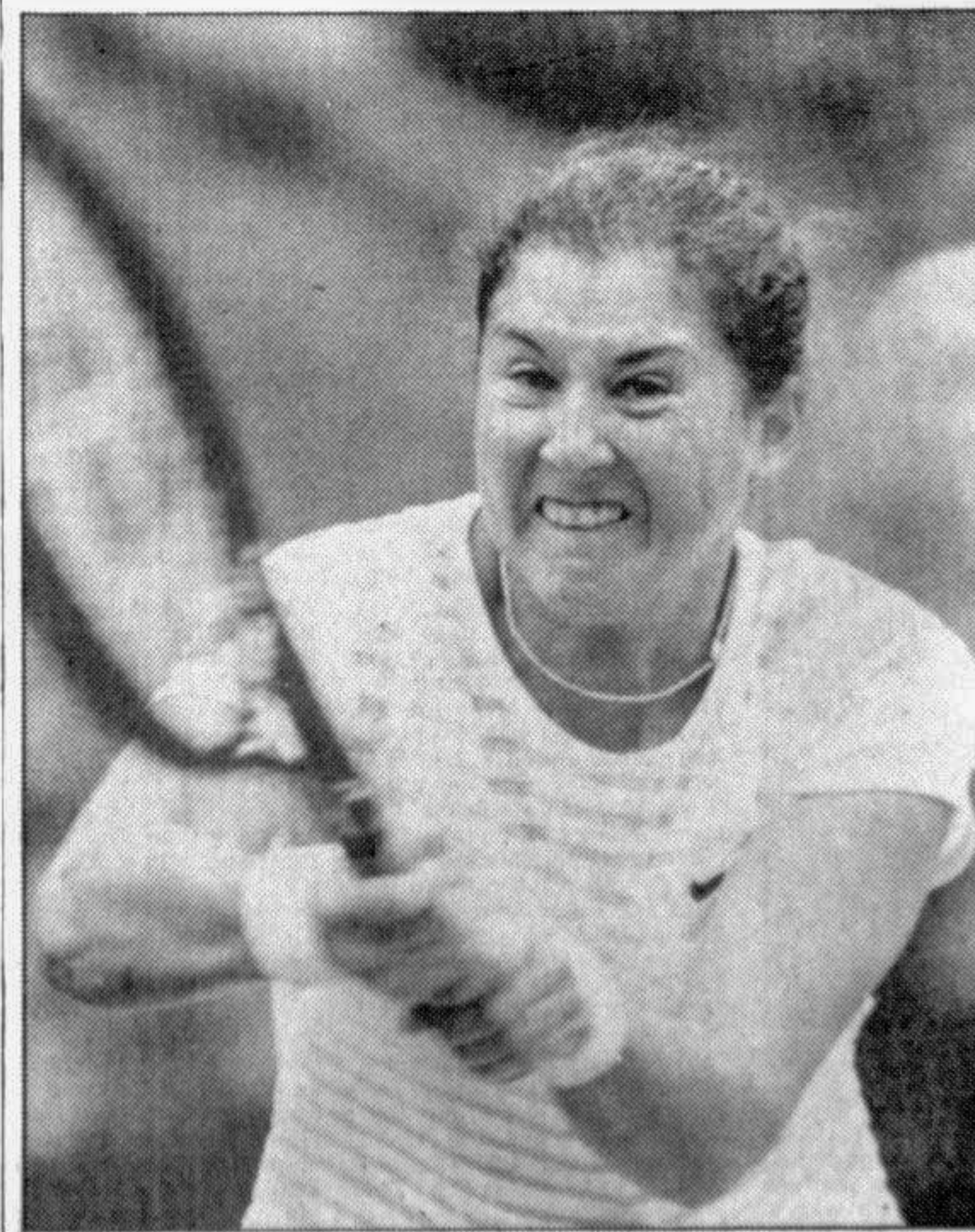
"I'm very disappointed because I like this tournament", said the American, a three-time winner here between 1991 and 1993.

Rafter, the US Open winner, refused to blame injury for his defeat but he twice needed medical attention during the second set.

Rios meanwhile easily dispatched unseeded Frenchman Arnaud Di Pasquale 6-4, 6-0.

The Chilean will face Haas in the next round.

Spain's Alex Corretja beat Olivier Delaitre of France 7-6, 7-5 in the other quarterfinal.



Monica Seles in action at the Kremlin Cup on October 23. — AFP photo

German swimming coach cleared, fined

BERLIN, Oct 24: A former East German swimming coach on trial for allegedly giving anabolic steroids to young female swimmers had the charges against him dropped Monday but was ordered to pay a fine.

Volker Frischke was given a week to pay the fine of 5,000 marks (3,000 dollars).