

Van Roost enters final

AUCKLAND, Jan 8: Defending champion and top seed Dominique van Roost of Belgium will play third seed Julie Halard-Decugis of France in the final of the Auckland Women's Classic tennis tournament Saturday, reports AP.

Van Roost overcame a poor start against fourth-seed Australia Barbara Schett to win 3-6, 6-1, 6-0 Friday, the last set in just 17 minutes.

Halard-Decugis, who earned a wild card entry to this tournament last year when she returned from injury without a ranking, avenged her quarter-final loss last year to Italian Silvia Farina, the second seed, with a 7-6, (7-5), 6-1 win Friday.

Halard-Decugis finished 1998 with a ranking of 22, just three places behind Farina who looked tired after her marathon three-set effort against seventh-seed American Chanda Rubin in the quarterfinals Thursday.

Van Roost and Halard-Decugis have only met once before, at last year's United States Open, where the Belgian won the first-round match 6-2, 6-2.

Dosedel disposes of Rafter

ADELAIDE, Jan 8: US Open champion Pat Rafter suffered a major early season setback on Friday, losing to lowly ranked Czech Slavek Dosedel in the second round of the Adelaide men's hardcourt championships, reports Reuters.

Rafter, the Australian world number four, was comprehensively outplayed by the 74th, Dosedel, who trumped him with repeated passing shots for a 7-5, 6-4 victory.

The Queenslander was appearing in his first tournament back from a two-month lay-off caused by a knee injury.

His lack of match practice was apparent. Rafter's journeys to the net proved to be largely fruitless and his powerful serve was the only useful weapon in his armoury.

A thrilling tussle ended when the 29-year-old Czech converted his fifth match point.

Rafter, the top seed in Adelaide, is among the favourites for this month's Australian Open in Melbourne and could even grab Pete Sampras' number one spot if he wins.

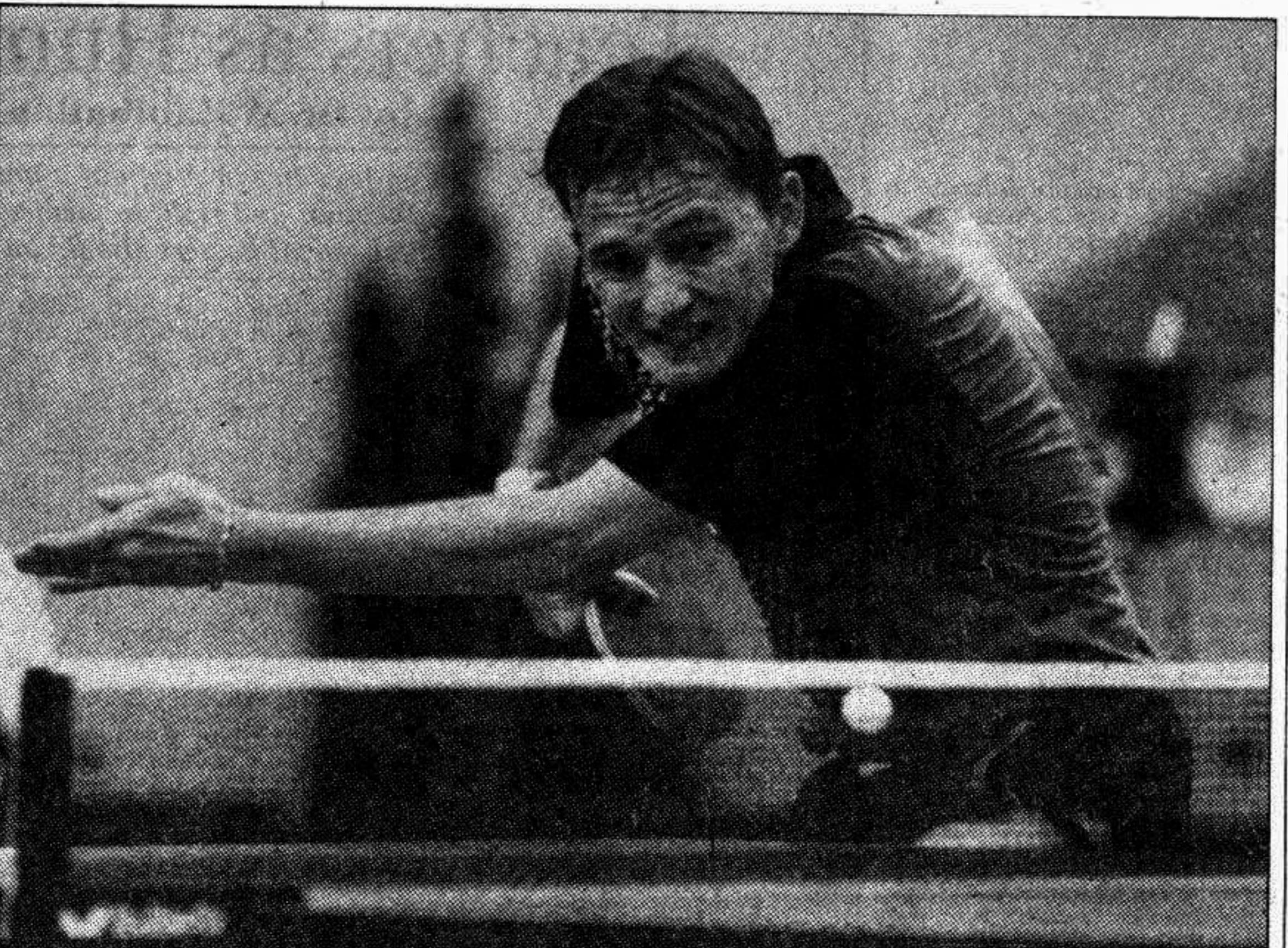
L'pool's version of events

LONDON, Jan 8: Liverpool denied reports on Thursday that Robbie Fowler had rejected an offer to stay with the club and said talks with the striker were continuing, reports Reuters.

British newspapers reported Fowler had turned down an eight million pounds (13.21 million dollars) deal to keep him with the club after his current contract expires in 18 months.

But the club said on Thursday "discussions were ongoing" with the player and they believed he wanted to stay with Liverpool.

"He has not turned down a Liverpool deal," Liverpool said on its club call line. Further talks with Fowler and his agent are planned.



Belgium's Jean-Michel Saive serves against Austrian Werner Schlager at the ITTF Pro-Tour de Paris on January 7. The Belgian won 3-2.

—AFP photo

Wang springs a surprise



PARIS, Jan 8 (AFP): A procession of champions waltzed into the men's quarterfinals of the ITTF-Pro Tour finals event here on Thursday — but world number-one Vladimir Samsonov lost lame.

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Germany's Jing-Tzorner who qualified in first place, fell at the first hurdle 21-18, 18-21, 21-17, 21-14 to Croatia's Tamara Boros, the only European to make the last eight.

World number five Jing, a defensive player, was no match for the consistent attacks of Boros, who claimed just 19th in the world. Boros now meets China's Lin Ling, who ousted Germany's Gwanghong Gotsch 21-12, 21-17, 20-22, 21-18, in the quarter-finals.

The shock of the day came when China's Asian champion Wang Lixin thrashed world number-one and the tournament's defending champion Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus 21-17, 21-4, 21-18.

In today's quarterfinals, Liu faces France's Patrick Chila, who beat 1991 world champion Jorgen Persson of Sweden 21-17, 21-17, 21-18. Persson, however, was hampered with a back injury which contributed to his loss.

"It's no disgrace to lose to Chila but 3-0 was a bit harsh," said Persson.

"I had two opponents today — Chila and my back injury."

Reigning world champion Jan-Ove Waldner had a convincing win over Germany's Peter Franz 17-21, 21-16, 21-13, 21-14 to set up the only all-European quarterfinal in the men's singles. He meets Belgian Jean-Michel Saive.

Former European champion Saive had the best comeback so far in the competition, beating Austria's Werner Schlager 21-18, 21-19, 20-22, 18-21, 23-21 on his third match point of the fifth set.

Schlager had led 10-5, 12-8 and 15-12 in the final set before the fighting qualities of Saive, also the 1993 world men's singles runner-up, came to the fore.

In an all-Chinese bottom half to the draw, Kong meets compatriot and world number nine Yan Sen, who beat

France's Christophe Legout 21-18, 21-16, 17-21, 21-18.

The winner of the Kong/Yen battle meets either world number six Ma Lin, who beat Greece's Kallinikos Kreanga 21-23, 21-7, 21-10, 21-13, or Samsonov's conqueror Wang.

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