

Agent thinks Petit won't leave

LONDON, Mar 20: French player Emmanuel Petit's agent dismissed reports Friday that Petit threatened to quit English football, reports Xinhua.

The Arsenal midfielder had announced he was fed-up with English referees after receiving his fourth red card Saturday.

But Petit's agent, Jerome Anderson, has cast doubt over the move-saying: "Any great player do have a situation when they blow hot and cold-like Eric Cantona."

"The fact is that Petit has had problems with certain aspects of the English game, but he has also had some fantastic times."

"It has crossed his mind to look to pastures new ... but at this moment in time it is absolute nonsense to say he is going to quit this and quit that. It is just not true," he said.

Speaking in the Mirror newspaper, Petit had earlier said: "I'm totally fed-up with what has been happening. I've just had enough and I won't change my mind."

"If I'm going to be shown the yellow card every time I open my mouth or make a mistake on the pitch — while others are getting away with much more — I'm wasting my time here."

"These people are supposed to be out there on the pitch to protect skillful players from bad tackles, not to punish those players every time they put a foot wrong."

"Some of the Arsenal team have been trying to talk me around at training this week and I appreciate their concern," he added.

Ali's agent sues Columbia Pics

ROANOKE, Virginia, Mar 20: The longtime manager and an associate of former heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali have filed a lawsuit seeking to block Columbia Pictures from making a movie about the American boxer's life and seeking 50 million dollar in damages, reports Reuters.

Ali's former manager, Jabir Herbert Muhammad, and Jason Marcus Hirschfield, the son of Ali's former attorney, said they control the rights to the three-time heavyweight champion's life story through Muhammad Ali Productions, a production partnership with Ali.

"The sole purpose of this corporation was to own, develop and commercialise any authorised biographical or autobiographical story of the life and times of Ali," said the lawsuit, filed in Roanoke.

The lawsuit, filed on March 11, alleges that Ali sold the rights to his life story to Columbia Pictures without consulting his partners in the production company after learning they were in talks with another potential film producer.

The lawsuit was filed against Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc, parent company of Columbia Pictures, which is preparing to shoot a film on Ali's life starring actor and rap singer Will Smith in the lead role.

Ali's wife, Lonnie, in a statement issued by Sony, said the lawsuit was a "calculated attack on Muhammad personally." The 57-year-old Ali, once known to "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee," has been slowed by parkinson's disease.

Born Cassius Clay, the famed boxer knocked out Sonny Liston to become world heavyweight boxing champion for the first time in February 1964. The day after the fight, he announced his conversion to Islam and changed his name to Muhammad Ali.

Ali later refused to be drafted into military service during the Vietnam War, and had his boxing licence suspended. He regained the heavyweight crown by dropping George Foreman in the eighth round of a 1973 fight, lost the title to Leon Spinks in 1978, and regained it in a rematch six months later.

Chung's Pyongyang trip postponed again

SEOUL, Mar 20: For the second time this year, South Korea's top soccer administrator has been forced to postpone a scheduled visit to North Korea, says said Thursday, reports AP.

Chung Mong-joon, president of (South) Korea Football Association, had been scheduled to begin a six-day visit to North Korea on Friday to discuss sports exchanges and the possibility of holding some of the 2002 World Cup games in the communist nation.

But soccer officials of both sides, who met in Beijing Wednesday and early Thursday, failed to agree on the itinerary and other details of Chung's visit, association officials said.

They declined to say why and how long the visit will be delayed.

Chung initially had planned to visit North Korea in mid-January but was forced to call off the trip a few days before he was to have departed Seoul.

As a co-host of the 2002 World Cup with Japan, South Korea has the right to stage 32 matches.

Chung has expressed hope that two or three of the matches assigned to South Korea will be staged in North Korea. The North has not officially responded to the suggestion.

Attempts to promote sports exchanges between the two Koreas are always vulnerable to political tension. The two Koreas are still technically at war, since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not in a peace treaty.

Cottee relishing Wembley battle



LEICESTER, England, Mar 20 (Reuters/Internet): Two years after taking "early retirement" Tony Cottee returns to Wembley Stadium on Sunday for a fourth and probably final crack at winning the first major honour of his 17-year career.

And the fact that Leicester City's opponents in the League Cup Final are Tottenham Hotspur, Cottee's long-time favourite opposition, bodes well for City's aspirations of a second League Cup triumph in three years.

"At this stage of my career the prospect of finally being a Wembley winner means everything to me," said the 33-year-old former West Ham and Everton striker.

As a 17-year-old, Cottee celebrated his West Ham debut by scoring against Spurs. His 100th league goal was also against Spurs and soon after kick-starting his league career with Leicester last season, on his return from being "pensioned off" to Malaysia, he was on target again in a 1-1 draw at White Hart Lane.

"I'm reluctant to say Spurs are a lucky club for me because football has a habit of making you eat your words," said Cottee. "But my record against them has always been pretty good, as has my career in the League Cup."

In his first game in the com-

petition he scored four goals for West Ham in a 10-0 win over Bury. And he's been Leicester's success-story in this season's competition, with five goals in four games, including all three in the two-leg semi-final against Sunderland.

"It really would mean an awful lot to me to help Leicester win the Cup again because I've got to look at this as my last chance to win that elusive winners' medal," he said.

Cottee played in three Wembley finals for Everton and lost them all — and that has made his team mates even more determined to help him collect a winner's medal on Sunday.

"Northern Ireland midfielder Neil Lennon said: "All players want to win a medal, but for Tony to have such a glorious career and come away with nothing would be a travesty."

"The guy's a fantastic professional, his attitude is spot-on, and he's a natural goalscorer."

You're born with the talent he's got. And he's such a nice guy to have around the club, on and off the field."

"If we do win it, it would be his final and trophy because he's done so much to get us there."

But Cottee admits it's becoming an increasing struggle to maintain his fitness level.

He was "rested" for Leicester's 1-1 draw with Charlton last weekend and missed training on Thursday because he was still feeling "a bit stiff."

"We know we're in for a tough time at Wembley. George Graham has done a great job turning Tottenham around. But on our day we're capable of beating anyone."

Midfielder Muzzy Izzet, who scored a contender for goal of the season against Spurs when Leicester beat the Londoners 2-1 in October, believes being underdogs on Sunday will suit the 1997 winners.

"It really would mean an awful lot to me to help Leicester win the Cup again because I've got to look at this as my last chance to win that elusive winners' medal," he said.

"If there's any secret to our success under Martin O'Neill it probably has something to do with the fact that we gel so well as a team," said Izzet.

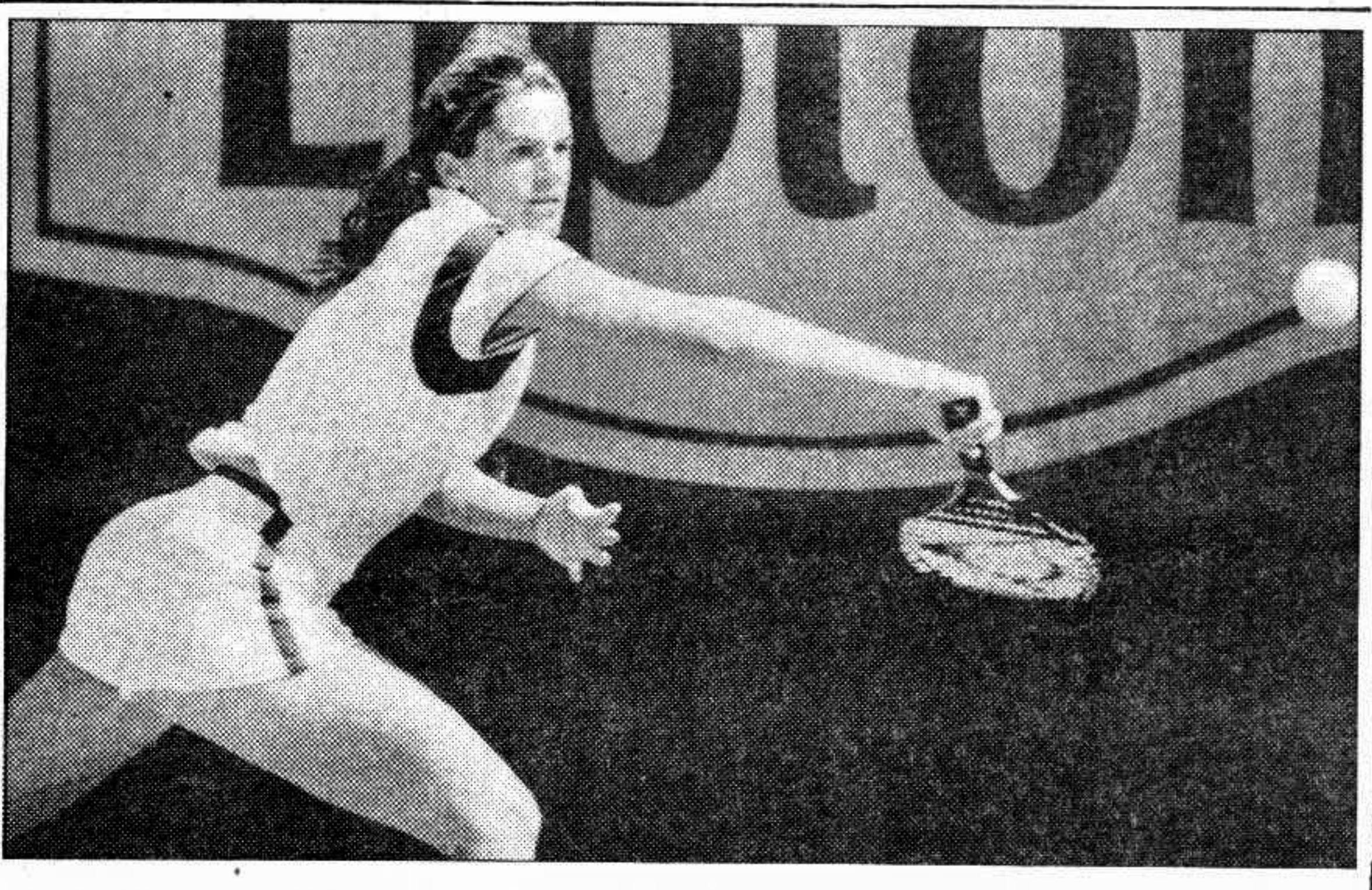
"We haven't got the millions of pounds other clubs can spend on signing top players. But we've got a terrific spirit, and will to win, in the dressing room."

"George Graham has injected a lot of his old Arsenal-thinking into Tottenham, who have a much more solid look about them now."

"But if Emile Heskey can play well against Sol Campbell it could give us the edge."

For City's Jamaican defender Frank Sinclair it's the chance of a second successive winners' medal after scoring for Chelsea in their 2-0 League Cup triumph over Middlesbrough last season.

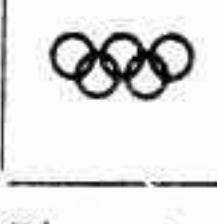
"When I was at Chelsea we used to beat Spurs all the time. But this is a different Tottenham team under George Graham," said Sinclair. "They'll be up for it as much as we are."



Amelie Mauresmo of France stretches for a return in her match against China's Fang Li at the Lipton Championships on Mar 19.

— AFP photo

Coles faces further test



LAUSANNE, Switzerland, Mar 20 (AP): An early morning fax from a jilted spouse has the International Olympic Committee looking again at the conduct of one of its members.

The jewelry has been the focus of news reports in Australia for the past week about the time Coles arrived in Lausanne for an emergency IOC assembly that expelled six members and adopted measures described as the first steps of reform in the wake of the Olympics' worst corruption case.

Pound said Thursday he would act if Georgina Coles sent him information. When he arrived at the committee's headquarters Friday for an executive board meeting, there was a fax from Australia.

"I can confirm that jewelry (a set of diamond cufflinks and a gold necklace) was given to Mr Coles and myself in Athens by a man involved in the Athens bid for the 1996 Olympic Games," Georgina Coles wrote. "This occurred in 1990."

The items have been appraised at 6,300 dollars — far beyond the IOC's 150 dollars limit on gifts from bid cities.

Already slapped with a severe censure for accepting lavish travel in the Salt Lake City bid scandal, Phil Coles could be expelled if the board finds he violated the rules again.

"We agreed to strengthen further efforts to ensure the success of the co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup," President Kim Dae-Jung said after a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi.

The two nations are trying to put decades of antagonism behind them to jointly stage the event.

ROK, Japan vow to help each other

SEOUL, Mar 20: South Korea and Japan today pledged to work together to ensure that the 2002 football World Cup to be co-hosted by both countries is successful, reports AFP.

In giving the matter to the executive board, the IOC abolished a five-member investigation panel that produced six expulsions, four resignations and 10 warnings in the IOC's worst scandal, the million-dollar vote-buying scheme of Salt Lake City's successful 2002 bid.

That took the case out of the

"I had the cufflinks made into earrings. This is my final statement on the matter."

Athens lost the 1996 race to Atlanta in September 1999. Finishing fourth in that contest was Melbourne, Australia.

Phil Coles appeared before the executive board and said he "appreciated the opportunity to explain the situation."

He said he would remain on leave from the board of the organising committee for next year's Summer Games in Sydney, Australia, "until the matter is resolved."

Coles said his ex-wife's actions were "a said development."

"She was obviously shown where to send it," he said, adding that he had "absolutely" no plans to resign from the IOC despite mounting pressure.

In Sydney, Olympics boss Michael Knight said the IOC had to investigate the jewelry case and called on Coles to "stop the pain" by quitting his board of SOCOG, the organising committee for the 2000 Games.

Coles' case came up during a meeting of the executive board with Sydney organisers.

"It's their business, not mine," SOCOG chief executive Sandy Holloway said. "They showed us a copy of the letter and said they want to deliberate on it."

He said SOCOG was still 135 million dollars short of its sponsorship revenue target, with 53 million dollars still to be identified. But he was confident much of the money will be raised.

"We acknowledge the climate has not been ideal, but so far it has not hurt us on the sponsorship side," he said. "All the sponsors want the scandal cleaned up and they have all stayed solid."



— AFP photo

GFA hails co-hosting idea

ACCRA, Mar 20: The Ghana Football Association (GFA) said a ruling that Nigeria and Ghana should co-host next year's African Nations Cup finals had the advantage of reducing the financial burden for host countries, reports Reuters.

"It's a laudable novelty idea which has created a precedent for the continent's elite tournament," GFA chairman Alhaji Jawula said on Friday.

Earlier, an unnamed Nigerian government official, quoted by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) called the co-hosting decision by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) "an insult to Nigeria."

He said his country's facilities for the World Youth Cup it is hosting from April 3-24 at eight venues should give it "an edge over Ghana or any other country."

However, Jawula said the move would allow CAF to test the concept of co-hosting and had the advantage of reducing the financial burden for host countries.

CAF had announced on Monday that Ghana and Nigeria would share the 16-nation biennial event. It said its decision was based on the fact that both Ghana and Nigeria last hosted the competition almost 20 years ago.

CAF stripped Zimbabwe of the right to host the tournament last month, saying its facilities were not up to scratch.

It said no country could carry the financial burden of hosting the cup alone at such short notice.

Ghana's leading bi-weekly sport magazine "Graphic Sports" also favoured one country hosting the event in its latest edition the paper called CAF's ruling "nebulous."

But Jawula said he had expected CAF to opt for co-hosting.

"If CAF in its wisdom says it has taken three years and Zimbabwe is still not ready and they (CAF) want to make things lighter for us by this method I think we have nothing to worry about," Jawula said.

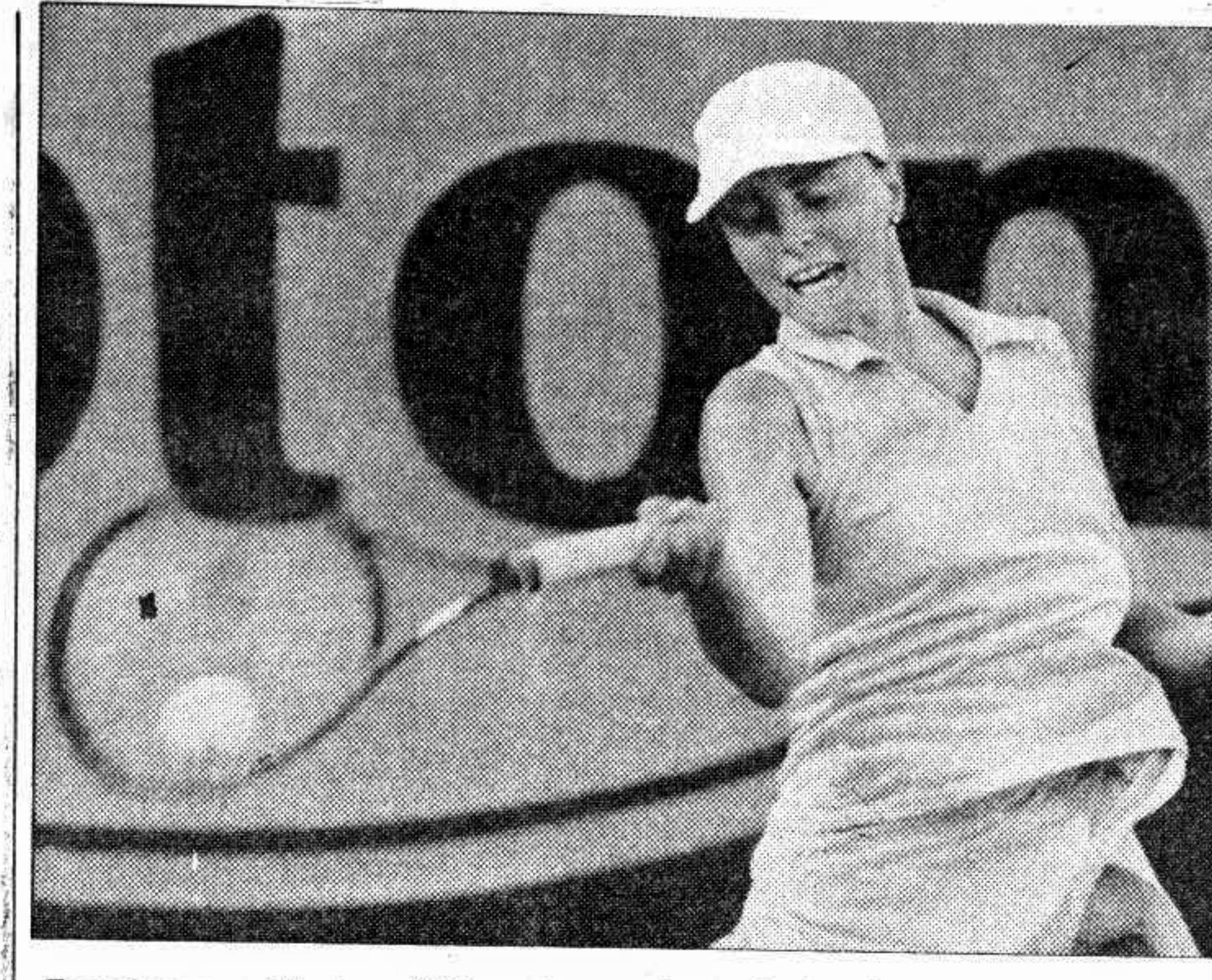
As hosts, Ghana and Nigeria will qualify automatically for the finals. Egypt, the defending champions, also has a guaranteed place in the finals.

Ghana will host the CAF congress, which precedes the tournament, and the opening ceremony. Nigeria will host the final, each country will host two groups.

"I appreciate that a lot. It feels great after having a few years of a lot of struggles, finally to go out there and not have to be worried about everything."

In men's play Friday, No 3 seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov lost to Vince Sapieha 6-7, 7-6, 6-2.

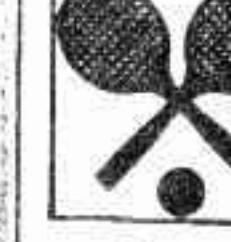
Kafelnikov double-faulted on set point to lose the second-set



Frenchwoman Marlene Weingartner makes a forehand return against compatriot Sandrine Testud at the Lipton Championships in Florida on March 19.

— AFP photo

Graf too good for Capriati



KEY BISCAYNE, Florida, Mar 20 (AP): At her best, Steffi Graf is still tough to beat.

Two comebacks

collided Friday, and Graf

showed no mercy with a 6-0, 6-1

victory over Jennifer Capriati in the second round at the Lipton Championships.

"That's the best she's ever

played against me," Capriati

said. "She would beat anybody

today, the way she played."

The 29-year-old Graf, slowed

by injuries for much of the past two years, is seeking her first tournament title since November. Based on Friday's performance, she's a threat to upset such youngsters as Martina Hingis and the Williams sisters.

Moving swiftly like one of

those teenagers, Graf won in

just 47 minutes. She lost only