## Sino shuttlers to fight for it

TOKYO, Apr 10: Gong Zhichao secured at least one title for China by beating Kim Ji-Hyun today to make the women's singles final an all-Chinese affair in the Japan Open badminton tournament, reports

The defending champion. who knocked the same opponent out of the prestigious all-England quarterfinals last month, repeated her excellent performance with a one-sided 11-0,11-6 victory over the South Korean.

With the win, Gong set up a re-match of last Japan Open final against world champion Ye Zhaoying, who fended off a challenge from young team-mate, 18-year-old Gong Ruina, for an 11-5, 11-6 victory.

Gong, ranked 12th against Kim's 41st, stormed into the lead to chalk 13 straight points to lead 2-0 in the second game.

Kim crawled back to 6-4, but Gong never gave her another chance and wrapped up victory in 33 minutes.

"In the past, I struggled to beat her, but it was rather easy today. I think it is because changed my tactics a little bit. especially, the course of my shots was very good," said Gong, who said Ye would be a much tougher prospect in the final. ."When I beat her last year, I

was very surprised, but I've never beaten her in big events. It is very difficult to beat her again, because she is apparently a better player right now. I'll just do my best," said Gong, referring to a rare victory against Ye last year.

Ye defeated Gong in two games in the quarterfinals on her way to winning her third straight all-England title last

Ye said: "We played each other so many times I don't think of any particular tactics against her. I think the one who plays her usual game will win tomorrow."

Gong Ruina, 18, who moved up to third in the world rankings after winning the Swedish Open last month, was never able to fight evenly against stylish Ye in the 28-minute match. World number one Peter

Gade Christensen lived up to his pre-tournament promise when he quashed the challenge from Wong Choong Hann of Malaysia for a 15-8, 15-12 victory. In the men's singles final Sunday, he will take on the

Grand Prix final winner, Sun Jun. who downed fellow Chinese Chen Hong 15-9, 15-12. Sun has beaten Grade Christensen in their last two encoun-

ters, with the last one winning the final of the Grand Prix final in February.

## Sydney assures

## Visitors

SYDNEY, Apr 10: Sydney Airport officials promised today Olympic visitors would spend only half an hour collecting their luggage and getting through customs at the 2000 Olympics, reports AFP.

October 2, the day after the closing ceremony, is forecast to be the busiest, with 134,000 passengers on 1,117 flights twice the average - using the airport.

That works out to one plane taking off or landing about every 50 seconds in the 17 hours the runways are open.

"These are the figures now and we believe they are achievable for the Olympics," Phillip Cash, the airport's Olympics manager, said.

"We are in training. We can deliver on the day," said Varina Nissen, director of corporate af-

A new rail link is being built but cash admitted the snag could be how many taxis and buses would be available. "Taxis and buses will be a

key issue during the Olympics." he said.

The airport is lobbying taxi firms and the licensing bodies to get as many cabs as possible at the arrivals terminal during the Games.

All of Sydney Airport's Olympic projections were formulated under the assumption the current 11 pm-6am curfew remained in place during the Games.

Cash said they would be helped by the fact so many Olympic teams would be setting up camps in other parts of Australia and would fly into Sydney on domestic non-peak

He said the airport, which is undergoing a two-billion-dollar (1.26 billion US) redevelopment, would handle 720,000 passengers, one million bags and 250 Olympic horses during the fortnight of the Games.

## Double blow for Spanish Fed

Cup team MADRID, Apr 10: (Reuters/ Internet): Fed Cup champions Spain will be without their match-winning duo of Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Conchita Martinez when they begin the defence of their title in Italy on April 17.

Spain's top two, who between them contested every point in last season's thrilling semifinal win over the United States and final victory in Switzerland, have both ruled themselves out of the first

round. Sanchez-Vicario said in February she was unlikely to play any Fed Cup tennis this season while Martinez announced this week she would not be available for the opening

Spanish captain Miguel Margets has named a secondstring team, led by Magui Serna and Virginia Ruano, both nonplaying members of last year's

Cup-winning squad. Serna, ranked number 26 in the world, and the 31st-ranked Ruano are joined by Maria Antonio Sanchez Lorenzo (37) and Gala Leon Garcia (44).



Defending champion Chinese Gong Zhichao is about to serve against Kim Ji-Hyun of South Korea during their women's singles semifinal engagement at the Yonex Japan Open badminton championships in Tokyo yesterday. Gong reached the final with an 11-0, 11-6 victory. - AFP photo

# Pierce stoops to Martinez

AMELIS ISLAND, Florida, Apr 10: Spaniard Conchita Martinez seeded seventh, upset fourth seed and defending champion Mary Pierce 3-6. 7-6 (7-4), 6-2 on Fri-

day to reach the semifinal of the Bausch and Lomb championships, reports Reuters. Martinez the 1994 Wibledon champion, has yet to advance past the round of 16 in five tournaments this year and is ranked only 17th after spending nearly the entire decade in the top 10, but her return to this

tennis resort may have been just what her ailing game needs. "I play great here," said Martinez, who won the 1995 Bausch and Lomb and reached last year's final before losing to Pierce in three-sets. "It's been a great week for me and you can

see the hard work is paying off." In other quarter final action ninth seed Anna Kournikova of Russia needed just 40 minutes to dispose of sixth-seeded Patty Schnyder 6-0, 6-2. That set up a semifinal meeting with Romania's Ruxandra Dragomir who dominated unseeded Fabiola Zuluaga of Colombia 6-3, 6-1. Martinez will face second-

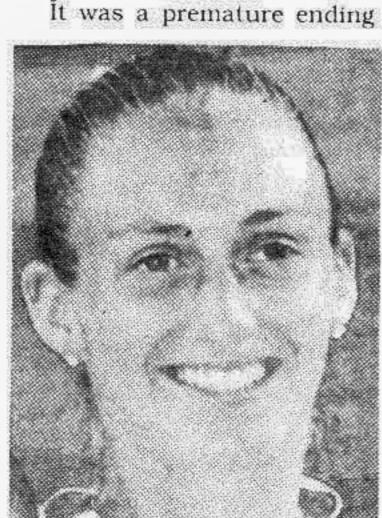
seeded Monica Seles. The 25year-old American eliminated fifth-seeded Amanda Coetzer of

South Africa 6-3, 6-0, Pierce had a chance to close out Martinez during a second-

set tiebreaker but could not

hold a 4-3 lead and lost the last four points - three of them on unforced errors. Pierce never recovered from losing the tiebreaker and had her serve broken twice in the

deciding set. She committed 55 unforced errors in the two-hour 43-minute match compared to only 29 for Martinez.



MARY PIERCE

for Pierce who had reached the Bausch and Lomb final the past three years. Her legs cramped up in the third set and may have resulted from getting pushed to three sets the night before against Nathalie Dechy.

Kournikova, who later withdrew from doubles competition when she aggravated a muscle in her left hip, is now two wins away from her first WTA tour

Dragomir who has not dropped more than four games in any of her matches this week, needed just 49 minutes to eliminate the unseeded Zuluaga. Dragomir won 33 of 42 points on her serve and never allowed the 20-year-old Colombian a break point opportunity. The 26-year-old Romanian had not gotten past the round of 16 in eight tournaments this

Dragomir in three sets at the 1998 Canadian Open. Seles only took 55 minutes to eliminate Coetzer who had beaten her two months ago in the semifinals of the Pan-Pa-

year. In their only previous

meeting Kournikova beat

cilic Open. Seles has failed to reach the quarter finals in her last three events, hopes to use this lastclay-court tournament in the United States to get ready for next month's French Open.

## Intriguing semis keep FA Cup romance alive



LONDON, Apr 10(Reuters/Internet): The domestic double hopes of either Arsenal or Manchester Uni-

ted will come to an end on Sunday -- or at the latest in a replay next Wednesday -- when the two clash in the semifinal of the F.A. Cup at Villa Park.

League Cup winners Tottenham Hotspur meet last season's F.A. Cup runners-up Newcastle United in the second semi at Old Trafford, completing a quartet of clubs who have won the world's oldest knock-out trophy

30 times between them. Manchester United won the cup for the ninth time to overtake Spurs previous all-time record of eight cup wins in 1996. while Arsenal took their tally to seven wins when they completed the double last season. Newcastle have won the trophy

six times, although their last victory was as long ago as 1955. The pairings are full of possibilities which further enhance the romance of a competition which never loses its ca-

pacity to amaze and intrigue. Arsenal, who beat Newcastle 2-0 in last season's final to complete the double, are hoping to become the only club ever to do the double in consecutive

seasons. If both Arsenal and Newcastle win through to the May 22 final at Wembley it will be the

first "repeat" final since 1885 when Blackburn Rovers defeated Queen's Park of Glasgow 2-0, following up their 2-1 victory over the Glasgow side 12 months earlier.

United, meanwhile, who lead the Gunners by a point with a game in hand in the league, are hoping to become the first English club to achieve a treble" of English title, F.A. Cup and European Cup -- as well as winning a domestic double of their own for the third time in six years.

Tottenham, resurgent since former Arsenal boss George Graham took over at White Hart Lane in October, are also looking to complete a domestic cup double after winning the League Cup three weeks ago.

The only other club to achieve that particular feat is Arsenal -- under Graham in

Spurs (1961-1962 and 1981-1982) are one of only two clubs -- Newcastle (1951-1952) being the other -- to win the cup in successive seasons this century -- a feat Arsenal could emulate this season,

Newcastle may not be chasing anything other than a longoverdue win in the competition. but they go into their semifinal knowing that, like the other three, they have already secured a place in Europe next season. UEFA have ruled that New-

castle will qualify for the UEFA

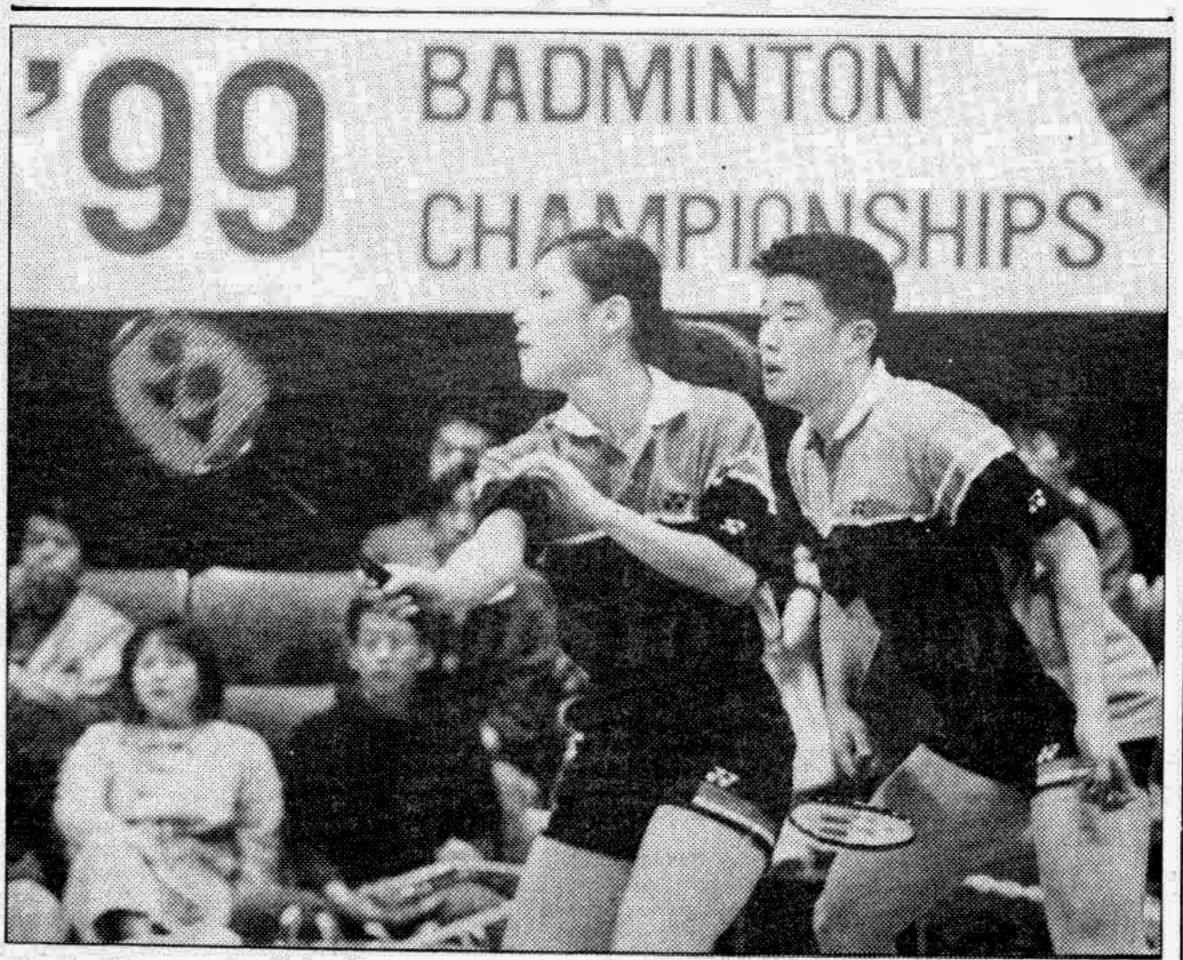
Cup even if they finish as losing semifinalists, but coach Ruud Gullit, who became the first foreign manager to win the cup, with Chelsea in 1997, would prefer a double of his own -- by becoming the first foreign coach to oversee two F.A. Cup winning clubs.

Action begins on Sunday at Villa Park at 1130 gmt -- with Arsenal bidding to prolong their superiority over United who could well come into the match less fresh following their exertions against Juventus in the European Cup on Wednes-

Arsenal are unbeaten against United in their last six matches and although they have already beaten United 3-0 in both the Charity Shield season curtain-raiser and a league match at Highbury in September, their 1-1 draw with United at Old Trafford on February 17 was a fairer reflection of their relative qualities.

Arsenal are without inspirational midifielder Emmanuel Petit, suspended after his third red card of the season, while United's main injury worry would appear to be defender Henning Berg.

Both clubs know so much about each other and have such strong squads that Sunday's match is bound to be close and could easily be drawn. Penalties may yet separate loser from winner.



South Korean mixed doubles pair of Chung Jae-Hee (L) and Ha Tae-Kwon in action against their Chinese opponents in the semifinals of the Yonex Japan Open in Tokyo yesterday. The Koreans won 15-6, 9-15, 17-14. — AFP photo

HONG KONG, Apr 10 (Reuters/ Internet): Andre Agassi and Boris Becker set up their first meeting for almost four years when they won their semifinals in the Hong Kong Open on Saturday.

Agassi crushed Hendrik Dreekman 6-3, 6-0 to reach his first ATP Tour final of the year while Becker beat compatriot Bernd Karbacher 6-4, 6-4.

Agassi continued the excellent form he has shown all week with a fourth consecutive straight sets victory.

The third seed needed only 48 minutes to brush aside Dreekmann who dropped his serve three times in each set. "I'm feeling really good. I'm hitting the ball well and mov-

ing well," said Agassi. Karbacher, who claimed the scalp of Australian second seed Patrick Rafter in the first round, had no answer to Becker's serve-and-volley game.

"My rhythm and timing is very good," said Becker. His last tournament win was in 1996 when he won the Grand

Slam Cup in Munich. Agassi holds a 9-4 advantage over Becker in their personal duels. The last time the two met was in the semifinals of the 1995 U.S. Open, Agassi wining in four sets.

"It will be great meeting him again," said Agassi.

## Jalabert wins Tour of Basque

AIA, Spain, Apr 10: Frenchman Laurent Jalabert won the Tour of the Basque Country cycling race Friday with a blistering time-trial victory in the fifth and final stage to crown his week in the lead, reports AP.

Jalabert of the ONCE team covered the 8.7-kilometre (5.4mile) course in 14 minutes and 12 seconds. He was 19 seconds faster than his nearest rival, Italian Wladimir Belli of Festina, and 31 seconds ahead of third-placed Spaniard David Etxebarrja.

"I was nervous because I could have had a bad day and lost everything," Jalabert told reporters after the time trial.

Jalabert took the lead Monday after winning the first leg. and remained at the top of the overall standings throughout the race by never letting the stage-winner open up too much of a gap and keeping his main rivals constantly in check.

The Frenchman's overall race time was 21 hours, 36 minutes and 11 seconds. Belli took second place, 51 seconds behind while fellow Italian Davide Rebellin of the Polti team slipped from the second place he had held throughout the week to No 3, one minute and one second behind the leader.

Earlier Friday Michael Boogerd of the Netherlands and Rabobank won the first part of the final stage, crossing the finishing line of the 118-kilometer (73-mile) course three seconds ahead of the pack led by Mario Aerts of Belgium and the Lotto team.

## SLOC tougher on confidentiality

SALT LAKE CITY, Apr 10: The Salt Lake Organising Committee adopted a gag order Thursday prohibiting board members from releasing confidential information — a rule punishable by expulsion, reports AP.

The vote came two months after SLOC president Mitt Romney, taking the reins as chief operating officer of the organising committee, promised a new era of openness in the Olympic movement.

The gag order was adopted after some members complained they were learning more from press accounts than Olympic managers. But Romney said press leaks often occur when SLOC letters and faxes are sent to board members. He urged them to show restraint, especially with budget material.

The confidentiality order was a much-discussed impromptu item during a meeting at the Utah Capitol of SLOC's 20-member management committee.

The committee also approved Romney's hiring of Fraser Bullock as executive vice president and chief operating officer. Bullock will begin work May 1. He replaces Dave Johnson, who was forced out in January amid revelations that Salt Lake boosters had used gifts. cash payments and other favours to win the 2002 Winter Games.

"I'm just going to focus like a laser" on SLOC finances and organising, said Bullock, 44, managing director of Alpine Consolidated, a Utah firm that specialises in business consolidations. He worked with Romney at Boston-based Bain and Co, and the friends have known each other for 18 years.

The board's new confidentiality order will not apply to its several ex-officio members who can't be replaced under any circumstance. They include Governor Mike Leavitt and Salt Lake City Mayor Deedee Corradini or their designees. "Clearly, we're not going to

ask the governor to resign" for divulging information, said board member James Swartz, who sponsored the gag order. It passed by a vote of 15-0 with Romney abstaining. "The secrets of the company

are the assets of a company,

said Barry Sanders, SLOC's outside attorney. "To tell a secret is to squander an asset." The order was refined several times before the voting. The final version wasn't limited to board members, so it apparently also applies to SLOC employees. It requires those who obtain "any communica-

tion written or verbal" that is

marked confidential to be kept

folks?

35 TV clown

Walter

41 Crafty one

36 Davis'

The rule is punishable by expulsion, but it is not clear how SLOC will determine or prove a violation has occurred.

# Becker to face | Schnyder no fan of Kournikova



AMELIA ISLAND, Florida, Apr 10 (Reuters/ Internet): Patty Schnyder is not planning to join the

Anna Kournikova fan club any time soon, and the friction between them only seemed to widen with the Russian teenager's drubbing of her Swiss rival at the Bausch & Lomb

Championships on Friday. Kournikova crushed Schnyder 6-0, 6-2 in just 40 minutes to reach the semifinals of the clay court event and afterward it was abundantly clear there was no love lost between the two.

"I hate playing her," Schnyder said. "It's her (as a) person, not her game. It's not the tennis that's the problem, it's my mind,"



American tennis star Andre Agassi plays forehand against Hendrik Dreekmann of Germany in their semifinal match at the Hong Kong open yesterday. Agassi won 6-3, 6-0.

HONG KONG, Apr 10 (Reuters/ Internet): Andre Agassi said in Hong Kong on Saturday that his marriage to actress Brooke

Shields was over. "We have filed for divorce and we are divorced ... it is over," the normally flamboyant U.S. tennis star told reporters after reaching the final of the \$350,000 Hong Kong Open. Agassi married Shields --

denly Susan" -- in California in 1997 in a quiet Roman Catholic ceremony. Witnesses said Shields, then 31, practically sprinted up the steps of the church, almost

star of the hit US sitcom "Sud-

tripping in a dress with a fivefoot (1.5-metre) train. After his marriage, Agassi's game deteriorated, he put on weight and -- critics say -- became sloppy.

The former world number one, winner of three Grand Slam titles, saw his ranking slump to 141. He began a comeback in 1998, ending the year ranked sixth. He is currently

After he was roundly thrashed at the Australian Open in January, speculation mounted that the root of his

Andre breaks up with Brooke woes was trouble at home. Speaking on Saturday after

bundling aside German Hendrik Dreekmann to reach his first ATP Tour final in 1999, the American denied that he had come to Hong Kong to escape the pressures bound to follow the high-profile divorce back home. "I needed to play more ten-

nis. I will be going to Tokyo after this event to play in the Japan Open," said Agassi, 28, who entered the Hong Kong event after requesting a wild card from the organisers. He will meet Germany's Boris Becker in Sunday's final.

due to celebrate their second wedding anniversary on April 19. He did not elaborate on causes of the break-up. An article printed in the U.S. magazine Fortune last month

Agassi and Shields had been

quoted Shields as saying Agassi gave her a self-esteem boost. Not only is her show "Suddenly Susan" running strong in its third season, but Shields has now bagged another show,

"Black and White", with Ben Stiller and Robert Downey Jr. "I feel like I've grown up a great deal in the past few years," she says in the article. "I feel as though I'm really looking toward the future."

complained Schnyder.

Last year, Kournikova also easily dismissed Schnyder 6-1, 6-3 here, after which the 20year-old Swiss player criticised Kournikova for poor sports-manship for using what Schny-

der felt were deliberate stall tac-Schnyder, who also lost to Kournikova 6-7 (5-7), 6-0, 6-3 last week at Hilton Head, was evasive Friday when asked specifically what bothered her

about playing the 17-year-old Russian glamour girl. "I can't tell you what it is," Schnyder said. "It's my head. I was really impressed with my-self that I could really play my game for one set against her at Hilton Head. Then I quit play-

ing. I just can't play against Many in tennis have been wondering about the 10thranked Schnyder's head lately.
After a banner year in which
Schnyder won five titles and moved into the upper echelon of women's tennis, she inexplica-bly fired her coach, Eric van Harpen, following the Australian Open in January and

Since coming under Harnecker influence, Schnyder's tennis has suffered and she has become estranged from her friends and family, who accuse the German of being some kind of Svengali.

Schnyder's parents tried unsuccessfully to get their daughter to split from Harnecker and have since said they will not welcome their daughter back until she leaves him.

"I think she has problems at home," Kournikova said. "I don't think she's happy. She doesn't look like a happy person to me, that's all.' It didn't help Schnyder's

sively to Kournikova, with whom she claims to have had a previous confrontation. "We're not the best of

mood any that she lost so deci-

friends," Schnyder said the day before their match. "There's been some fighting.' Kournikova, immensely popular with fans drawn to her cover girl looks, is not as popu-

lar among some of her peers who feel she garners too much attention for someone who has never won a single tournament. The Russian, however, flatly denied any past incident be-

tween her and Schnyder "I haven't ever spoken to her. I know her. I think she's a nice girl. I've never had any conversations with her or any problems," Kournikova insisted.

### Larios stops Escamilla

TEMECULA, California, Apr Oscar Larios successfully defended his Mexican Super Bantamweight Championship by stopping Miguel Escamilla after 10 rounds in a scheduled 12 round fight, reports AP.

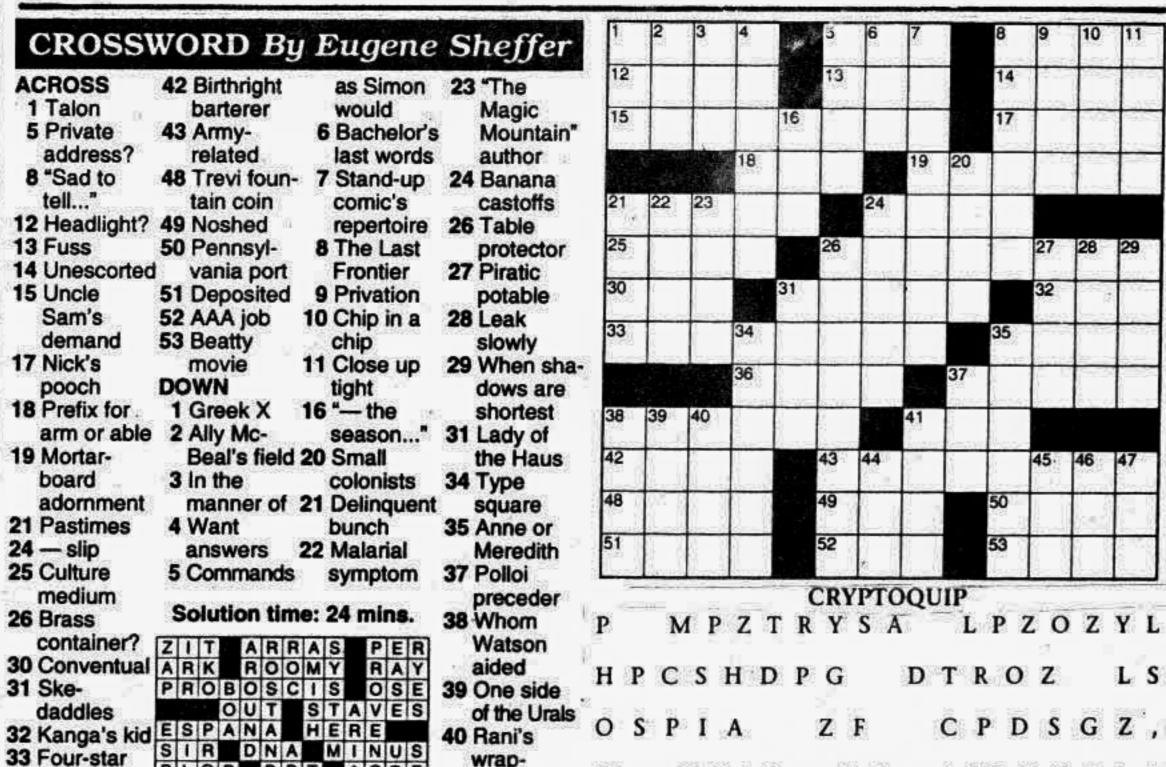
Although there were no knockdowns Friday night, Larios dominated the bout and won every round on the judges' scorecards.

Escamilla went back to his corner after the bell of the 10th round and conceded the fight. Larios, 22, improved to 32-2-1 with 25 wins by knockout.

The 23-year-old Escamilla fell to 19-3-1 with 15 knockout wins.



Indian Grand Master Viswanathan Anand (R) and Russia's Vladimir Kramnik take notes during their 6 encounter at the international tournament at Dos Hermanas, near Sevilla, Spain on April 9. - AFP photo



around

the skies

41 Took to

ETATEXILES

RUSSIA

37 Golf legend ANO ADREM

38 Pyrenean Yesterday's answer

namesakes E L S P R O K O F I E V.

PARNERDS

DTROZ LS CPDSGZ, AIPTGSA." H F MSSC Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE TENNIS CHAMP

AND HIS DEAR WIFE WERE A PERFECT MATCH.

44 O.J.'s Today's Cryptoquip clue: C equals L The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it 46 Disencumwill equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.