

## More gifts for Jong

TOKYO, Sept 7: North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong-Il gave a car and a flat Monday to a woman marathon runner who has earned the cash-strapped nation its first-ever World Athletics gold, official reports from Pyongyang said, according to AFP.

Runner Jong Song-Ok also made it no secret that her success was all because of her love for the "Great Leader," in a blaze of propaganda carried over the weekend to coincide with important dates in the Stalinist state.

Kim Jong-Il marked one full year in absolute power on Sunday, four days before the 51st anniversary of the founding of a country dogged by famine and international mistrust over its nuclear and missile development.

"Marshal Kim Jong-Il is the man who stirred up the heart of Jong Song-Ok," Rodong Simmun, the newspaper of the all-powerful Workers Party, commented on her triumph at the World Athletics Championships at Seville on August 29.

"Ardent worship for her leader was the secret of her victory and matches willpower," Jong was awarded the titles of national heroine and people's sportswoman, along with a gold star medal and a national flag order first-class, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

"A gold wrist-watch bearing the august name of the great leader President Kim Il-Sung and gift of the great leader to Jong-Il were also conveyed to her," according to the official news agency monitored here. "The gifts included a luxury car and a flat."

Jong thanked Kim for training her and giving her "inexhaustible strength and courage for victory and glory," KCNA said.

KCNA reported "she vowed to become a true daughter who always brings joy and pleasure to the fatherly marshal and remains loyal and dutiful to him."

State media earlier reported one million people turned out in the streets of Pyongyang Saturday to welcome home the 25-year-old runner, and that Premier Hong Song-Nam hosted a banquet in her honour.

A new song entitled "Welcome to Jong Song-Ok" could be heard "at the airport and streets of the capital city of Pyongyang and all other parts of the country," KCNA said.

The party newspaper called on people to "defy economic blockade and pressure and vigorously accelerate the march at a canter on a steed to build a powerful nation and thus display courage and a staunch spirit like Jong Song-Ok."

On September 5, 1998, the junior Kim, also head of the Workers Party, was reelected as head of the national defence commission, a post redefined as the nation's highest: His father Kim Il-Sung, who died four years earlier, was made "eternal president."

## All-Africa Games football

### Hosts firm favourites

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 7: Tradition suggests South Africa will be strong challengers at the All-Africa Games football tournament with five of the previous six hosts reaching the final, reports AFP.

Congo, Nigeria and Algeria won the first three championships and Kenya and Zimbabwe were beaten by Egypt, who flopped at home in 1991 when Cameroon defeated Tunisia.

The seventh edition of a competition set to rival athletics for centre stage at the 1999 finals in Johannesburg kicks off on Thursday when South Africa meet Algeria and Mali tackle Uganda in Group 1 matches.

Cote d'Ivoire play Zambia and Cameroon face Mauritius in Group 2 on Friday. The mini-league action continues until September 14 followed by classification matches, semi-finals, a third-place play-off and the final.

South Africa, Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire appear the best bets for gold in an intriguing event with Mali and Zambia dark horses, Algeria and Uganda outsiders, and Mauritius no-hopers.

European club commitments will deprive South Africa of senior squad players Aaron Mokoena, Bradley Carnell, Quinton Fortune and 1998 African Nations Cup hero Benni McCarthy.

And while some contenders have been in camp for several weeks, local coach and former star Ephraim Shakes Mashaba has just four days to mould a winning combination.

While African Champions League commitments rob Cote d'Ivoire of the teenage stars from defending champions ASEC, they remain a formidable force having qualified from the toughest zone.

The Ivorians finished above hosts Ghana and Nigeria in a mini-league that demonstrated their defensive strength with just one goal conceded in three rounds.

Cameroon proved particularly impressive in away matches en route to South Africa, scoring four goals in Rwanda and three in the Central African Republic.

Zambia proved their worth with home and away wins over Zimbabwe, although the absence of midfielder Andrew Sinkala, who joined German giants Bayern Munich in mid-year, is a blow.

Mali boast an excellent record in age-limit competitions with the youth team finishing third behind Spain and Japan at the world championships in Nigeria last April.



Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic smiles during her news conference on September 6. — AFP photo

## Novotna calls it quits



NEW YORK, Sept 7: Surrounded by teenagers with booming serves and ground games to match, Jana Novotna decided Monday to leave tennis, announcing her retirement at the US Open, reports AP.

Novotna, who will be 31 next month, said she would keep her tournament commitments for the remainder of the year and then put away her rackets.

"I've been thinking about this for a very long time," she said. "It's really difficult to point out one thing. I just feel the time for it is right."

Novotna's decision comes less than a month after longtime rival Steffi Graf announced her own retirement.

"It is very ironic, actually," Novotna said. "When I was 14 years old, when I started my career, when I travelled for my first international tournament, I happened to play Steffi Graf in the first round. It is pretty incredible that we are retiring in the same year."

Novotna said a nagging ankle injury had nothing to do with the decision.

"Physically, I'm fine," she said. "There is really no problem. My ankle injury doesn't have anything to do with the decision."

But after losing in the third round of the Open last Friday to Anke Huber, Novotna expressed

doubts about her future.

"If I feel I can no longer compete with these players or I cannot physically be out there and stay in the top 10 and play on the level I would like to play, then I will think about leaving," she said. "But for right now, I want to take time to think about everything and don't make any emotional statements."

It took just three days for her to make the decision.

Novotna won her 24th WTA Tour event this season at Hanover, beating Venus Williams in the final. She has earned more than 10 million dollars in a career that began in 1986.

Novotna said the new generation of women players is more physically fit than ever before. One of those baseline boomers is Serena Williams, who said she would miss Novotna's voice.

"It's the sweetest voice I've ever heard," she said. "It's so light. You'd think someone with her stature, her size, how long she's been around the tour and stuff. I never realised that her voice was like that."

Novotna said her victory at Wimbledon a year ago fulfilled her greatest ambition in tennis and made her decision to leave the sport less troubling.

"Winning Wimbledon last year and having the wonderful year that I had just made everything much easier," she said. "I said throughout my career that winning one Grand Slam tour-

namment would be very fulfilling and it would be a dream come true for me. It finally did happen. That was the greatest thing that ever happened."

"I can just look back and be very happy and very thankful for the career that I've had. I'm very happy with this decision."

It was at Wimbledon in 1993 that she suffered her greatest disappointment. Leading Graf 4-1 and 40-15 in the third set, five points away from the championship, she came apart. Graf rallied to win the title, leaving Novotna in tears as she accepted the runner-up trophy from the Duchess of Kent. It was one of the most emotional moments in the tournament's history.

In 1997, Novotna was No 2 in the world and made it back to the finals at Wimbledon again, this time beaten by Martina Hingis, left again to accept the runnerup trophy and the Duchess' sympathies.

Finally, last year came the break through when she defeated Hingis in the semifinals and Natalie Tauziat in the finals.

Given her frequent meetings with the Duchess, Novotna was asked whether she had discussed the retirement decision with her.

She laughed. "Yes, I called her last night," Novotna said. "She said, 'Don't do it.' I said, 'I have to. I'm still going to come (to Wimbledon) because I have the little badge.'"

## Something best forgotten



NEW YORK, Sept 7: Jennifer Capriati spoke of her teenage rebellion and confusion as she sought to close the door on her past. Yet she revealed how fragile she remains, leaving the US Open once again in tears.

An hour after losing to Monica Seles 6-4, 6-3 in the fourth round Monday, Capriati began a news conference by reading a statement she wrote before the tournament and saved until she was finished.

"I know there is much mystery, much question to what happened, and I must also say many lies," the 23-year-old player said of the collapse of her career in 1993, her subsequent arrests on shoplifting and drug possession charges, and her rehabilitation.

"Yes, I made mistakes by rebelling, by acting out in confused ways," she said, taking deep breaths as she read. "But it was all due to the fact I was very young and I was experiencing my adolescence. Most of you know how hard that can be. When you do it in front of the world, it is even harder."

She spoke of taking a different path than other players, learning a lot about herself and life along the way.

"If I knew there would be so much pain in learning life's lessons," she said, "I would have been hesitant to take the path that I took. It's the only thing I do regret."

"Let me say that the path I did take for a brief period of my life was not of reckless drug use, hurting others, but it was a path of quiet rebellion, of a little experimentation of a darker side of my confusion in a confusing world, lost in the midst of

finding my identity.

"I made mistakes, and yes, I am to blame, and no one else. I am sorry to my loved ones that I humiliated and embarrassed. And I'm sorry to my fans who feel I let them down. I'm sorry to myself for causing such pain."

Capriati said she has put much of her past behind her and feels she's moving in the right direction as she starts a new chapter in her life. She added that this would be the last time she speaks about the past, and asked the media to respect her wishes to stay away from the subject.

She said the statement was something she had been wanting to write for a long time, and that this felt like the right moment. She had told her father about it — Stefano Capriati sat in the interview room listening to her — but hadn't told her mother, who is divorced from her father.

Then in response to questions about her statement, Capriati said she wrote it be-

cause she was "tired of all the questions" about her past, "all the mystery. Just once and for all, I wanted to get it over with."

Yet, Capriati never really clarified the events that led to her arrests or what happened to her afterward. The "mystery" remains untold, and Capriati said she's still not ready to talk about it publicly.

Then she was asked, "Do you still see the media as your adversary?" Capriati hesitated. She has been the subject of mostly sympathetic stories her entire career, despite her troubles, yet she remains wary of the media.

"I'm going to start crying. It's nothing bad, it's just..." Capriati broke off and began sobbing uncontrollably.

"It's just a little overwhelming, that's all," she said.

A WTA Tour representative, Jim Fuhse, asked her if she wanted to stop. Capriati shook her head.

"It needs to be done," she said.



Jennifer Capriati makes an outburst after losing a point. — AFP photo

## OPEN NOTEBOOK

NEW YORK, Sept 7 (AFP): A thawing in relations between Andre Agassi and the US Tennis Association means the world number two may again make himself available for Davis Cup.

After the USTA summarily dismissed well-liked physician George Fareed — the last in a string of decisions that annoyed Agassi — the Nevada native declared he wouldn't play in the nations tournament.

Now Fareed has been hired back in a secondary role in the team, and Agassi said that decision, and other efforts by the USTA to solicit player input, might lure him back.

"I'm certainly reconsidering it," Agassi said. "There have been efforts made on behalf of the USTA to kind of allow the players to have a bit more input as to the things that really affect the players out there on the court. We're going to take it one step at a time."

Agassi said he would also push for players to have the ultimate word on who captains the team, although he said his decision to return wouldn't depend on having a particular person as captain.

"I'm not as concerned with who the captain is as much as I'm concerned with how the captain is picked," Agassi said.

### VOICE AS LIGHT AS HER VOLLEY

Former Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna, who announced Monday that she would retire at the end of the year, will be remembered by many for her delicate serve and volley game.

But 17-year-old Serena Williams said she'll remember Novotna's silvery voice.

"I like her voice," Williams said. "It's the sweetest voice I've ever heard. It's like so light. You think someone with her stature, her size, how long she's been around on the Tour and stuff, I never realised that her voice was like that."

### SELES TRYING HARD

Monica Seles, who won her two US Open titles on the old Louis Armstrong Stadium at the National Tennis Center, is trying hard to learn to love the cavernous Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Seles has always found the giant Ashe court windy — her fixation on the subject showing in her analysis of which doors can be opened or closed to change the direction of the gusts.

"I just realised that it's going to be windy for the rest of my career here," Seles said. "The stadium is going to play fast, all these things."

"I just said, 'I'm going to do the best I can with it. It's windy for my opponent, everybody else. Stop moaning about it.'"

"You are always going to have favourite places and not," she said. "Hopefully it's going to grow on me."

## Sripan named AFC player for August

Thailand's Tawan Sripan has been named as the Asian Football Confederation's player-of-the-month for August, says a press release.

Midfielder Tawan led Thailand to their fourth successive gold medal at the South East Asian Games in Brunei with his tireless performances at the heart of the Thai team.

The award marks a return to form for Tawan after a difficult period in his career. After leading the Thais to victory in the final with two goals in the 4-0 victory over Vietnam. He suffered a serious knee injury which put him out of the game for a year.

With a long rehabilitation period behind him, Tawan has now returned to form, scoring the goal that gave Thailand their 1-0 win in the semifinals over Singapore and then driving the team to its record ninth SEA Games gold medal.

The winner of the coach-of-the-month is Kim Ho, the man who guided Korean league side Suwon Bluewings to a position of dominance at home and into the next round of the Asian Club Championship.

Under Kim, Suwon won the league championship in 1998 and look to be well on the way to repeating the feat, heading the K-League standings by eight points at the end of the month. In addition, the club also won the Adidas Cup with a comfortable 1-0 win over Anyang in the final.

Suwon's successful month came to a close when they qualified for the second round of the Asian Club Championship with a convincing 9-4 aggregate victory over PSIS Semarang of Indonesia.

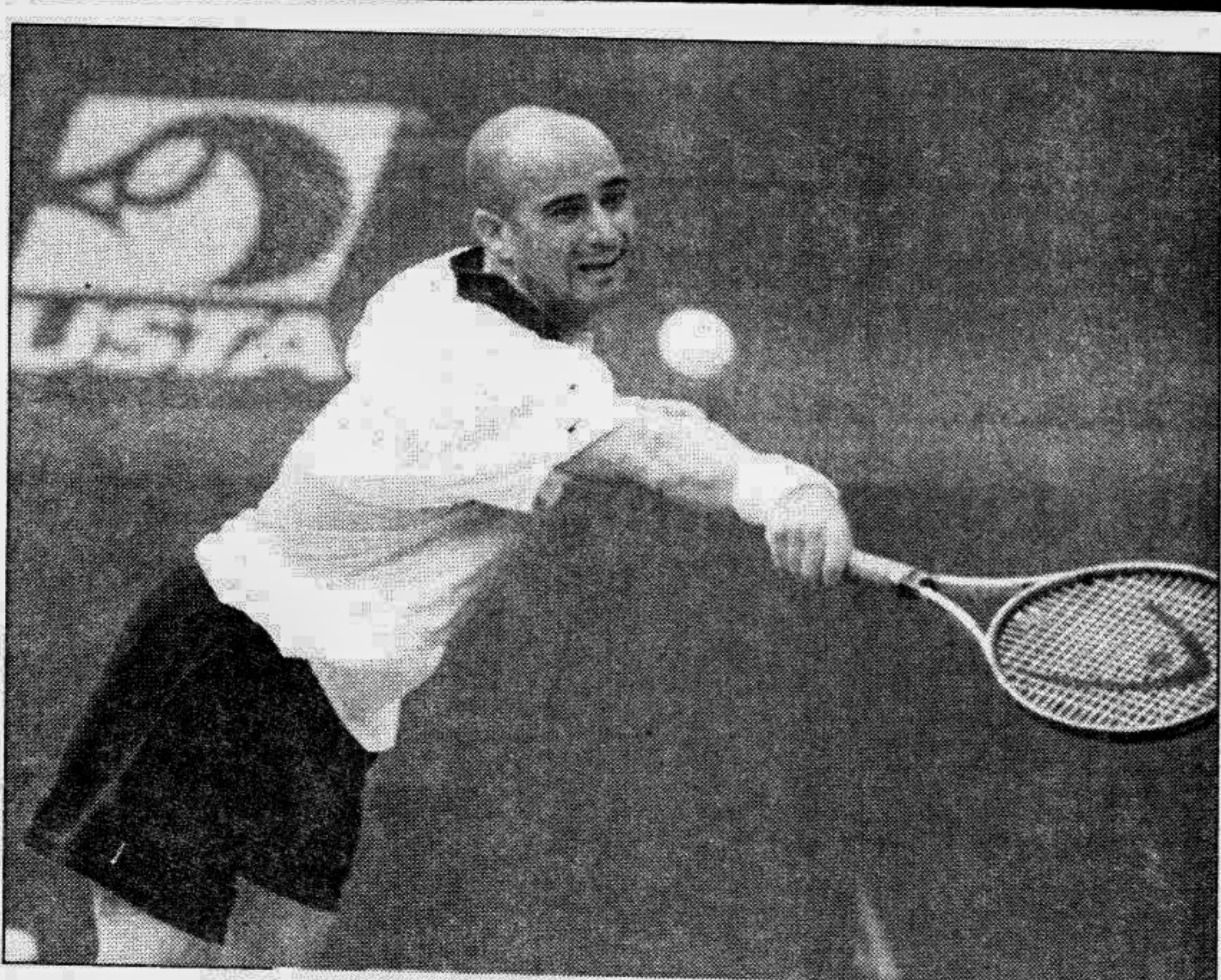
Palestine, meanwhile, have picked up the AFC's team-of-the-month award after their performances at the Pan-Arab Games in Amman, Jordan.

The Palestinians reached the semifinals of the competition, just a year after the national association was accepted as a full member of both FIFA and the AFC.

After finishing second in their first round qualifying group, Palestine qualified for the last four by topping their second stage group ahead of Libya, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Although they lost 4-1 to hosts Jordan in the semifinals, Palestine showed that, despite their lack of experience they are ready to become a force to be reckoned with in the Middle East.

The month's final award, the goal-of-the-month, has been awarded to Ramadan Hamdi of Jordan's Olympic squad for his strike against Iraq in the Olympic qualifying tournament.



American Andre Agassi at full stretch in his match against France's Arnaud Clement. — AFP photo

## Escude, Agassi in qtrs



NEW YORK, Sept 7: Nicolas Escude became the first qualifier in history to reach the quarterfinals of the US Open on Monday. Unfortunately for him, Andre Agassi got there, too, reports AFP.

"I have no intention of making any further dreams come true for him," said second-seeded Agassi, the reigning French Open champion and undisputed favourite to claim his fifth Grand Slam singles title next Sunday.

Agassi grounded down unseeded Frenchman Arnaud Clement 6-4, 6-4, 6-3, while Escude triumphed 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 in a see-saw battle against 10th-seeded Chilean Marcelo Rios.

"I never dreamed I'd be playing him in the quarterfinals," Agassi said of Escude, a 23-year-old ranked 136th in the world who reached the semifinals of the Australian Open in 1998 — when he lost to eventual runner-up Rios.

Escude was almost too exhausted after his triumph in the hot, humid, windy weather to savour the achievement.

"Right now, very tired," he said. "My legs are very stiff, but I'm very happy to be in the quarterfinals in the US Open."

Escude, who saved two match points to beat Magnus Gustafsson in a first round five-setter, dropped his serve to give Rios a 2-0 lead. Then he

Chilean lost seven games in a row to surrender the first set and fall behind in the second.

"I don't think he had a game plan," Rios said.

"He just go for winners and if they don't go in, I don't think he has a strategy to play different."

Fortunately for Escude, his former world number one opponent's 43 unforced errors made his job easier.

Every time Rios put together a streak of games, three in a row in the second set and three in a row to open the third, Escude was able to respond.

"I'm in qualifying. In two days I play against Agassi," Escude said. "I'm very happy."

Agassi's victory over Clement, who nearly ended what proved an historic run at Roland Garros in the second round, was a battle of attrition.

"I was making him earn everything he did out there, so I knew in the long run I'd get the better of him," said Agassi, who earned an early break in each set and pressed home his advantage.

He ran Clement from side to side relentlessly, but said his main focus in the match was not to tire his opponent but to avoid giving him a chance to counter-punch.

"It's never my intention to keep the point going if I can end it," Agassi said.

"It was windy, it was hard to get a clean hit at the ball. Plus,

he doesn't give you much pace and he's really quick. He kind of can bait you into taking unnecessary risks, so you don't want to fall victim to that."

"You want to play disciplined tennis," Agassi said.

"I have more firepower than he does, so I knew if I could just continue taking good, quality cuts at the ball, you would keep the advantage in most of the points."

Australian Open champion and third seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov reached the quarters with a 7-6, 6-1, 6-0 victory over French Open finalist Andrei Medvedev.

"I couldn't ask for anything better than that," Kafelnikov said. "Finish the match in three straight sets, I had to struggle in the beginning. That first set took us 50 minutes. I was fortunate enough to win that set. I played the right points at the right time."

He next faces former Wimbledon champion Richard Krajicek, the 12th seed from the Netherlands who defeated unseeded American Vince Spadea 6-2, 7-6, 6-2.

The men's fourth round continues Tuesday with fifth seed Gustavo Kuerten facing unseeded Swede Magnus Norman. Seventh seed Todd Martin facing ninth-seeded Briton Greg Rusedski, German 14th seed Tommy Haas playing France's Cedric Pioline and Jiri Novak taking on Slava Dosedel in an all-Czech battle.

## Serena overcomes Conchita



NEW YORK, Sept 7 (AP): Serena Williams flexed her rippling muscles as she stepped up to serve the final game against Conchita Martinez, showing the weary Spaniard and everyone else the strength she had left.

Closing out her biggest win in a major tournament at the US Open on Monday, Williams took a moment to peer at Martinez standing far behind the baseline, then promptly served her 12th ace far out of Martinez's reach for a 4-6, 6-2, 6-2 victory.

At 17, Williams had the energy to stay with Martinez through long rallies and three tough sets, to keep going after her no matter how hot and muggy the weather had become.

Jets roared incessantly, the wind blew hot air through the stadium, and the sun burned through the clouds. It was the kind of day that wears down players, distracts them, makes them lightheaded, but Williams didn't let any of that bother her.

Williams, seeded No 7, played sloppily at times, whacking backhands wildly, missing too many easy shots.

But she endured through a combination of persistence and talent and youthful vitality to reach her first major quarterfinal with the victory over No 16 Martinez.

Now another older champion stands in Williams' way. No 4 Monica Seles, who won the US Open for the first time in 1991 when she was the same age Williams is today.

Williams isn't intimidated playing anyone — she's beaten virtually all the top players — and she's not worried about Seles, whom she's beaten in both their matches.

"I love playing Monica," said Williams, who has served more aces than any woman so far in the tournament. "Whenever we play, it's always very intense and very fun. I don't have anything to lose. She's ranked higher than what I am. It gets me more psyched up and pumped up. I tend to play better. I'm really looking forward to it."

Their matches haven't been so much fun for Seles, who lost to Williams on carpet in Chicago two years ago and in the hardcourt of Key Biscayne this year on Williams' way to the final she lost to sister

Venus.

With the Williams sisters both in the quarters here, they're still on track to meet in a final again — this time for one of the biggest prizes in tennis. But both have stiff competition before that happens.

Seles looked impressive in reaching the quarters with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Jennifer Capriati.

Against Williams, Seles knows she'll be facing "a lot of hard and fast balls" that will be tough to keep up with.

"She covers more ground than I do at this point, today or tomorrow," Seles said. "From that point of view, she does have the advantage."

That won't be the only hard-hitting match coming up.

Defending champion and No 2 Lindsay Davenport meets No 5 Mary Pierce in a quarterfinal duel between two of the biggest sluggers in women's tennis.

Davenport advanced Monday night against Julie Halard-Decugis 6-1, 6-2. Pierce scored a 6-3, 7-6 victory over Sabine Appelmans.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Yesterday's answer

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