

All Africa Games F'ball
Hosts thrash
Mali

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 12: South Africa overcame the shock of conceding a first-minute goal to outclass Mali 4-1 in the All Africa Games football tournament here on Saturday, reports AFP.

In the other Group 1 encounter of the day, Algeria bounced back into contention for a semi-finals place with a 2-0 victory over Uganda at Rand Stadium. The teams have three points each after two rounds. Ali Bendebka converted a cross after 34 minutes to put the North Africans ahead and a screaming 80th-minute drive from Reda Ben Hadjelali put the result beyond doubt.

Victory against Mali gave the South Africans a maximum six points after two rounds in Group 1 and a draw with Uganda at Orlando Stadium on Monday will assure them of top spot and a semi-final's place.

Mali have been a huge disappointment despite the inclusion of six overseas professionals and many of the youth team that finished third behind Spain and Japan in the world championships last April.

The West Africans complete their pool programme against Algeria and only a handsome victory coupled with an equally big South African triumph can save them from elimination.

South Africa fell behind after 107 seconds on a freezing, windy afternoon in the black township of Soweto when Soumaila Coulibaly converted a 30-metre free kick.

It took the home team some time to combat the superior physique of Mali and their equaliser after 30 minutes had an element of luck as Hareaphia Marumo punished poor positioning by goalkeeper Bouba Keita to head in.

Marumo set up the second South African goal after 66 minutes with a cross that Keita punted into the path of Siyabonga Nomvete, who fired home from close range.

Nomvete also grabbed the third with a shot that trickled into the net after his header was stopped by Keita and Patrick Mbuthu completed the rout from close-range strike in injury time.

Results on the third day of the All Africa Games football tournament here on Saturday:

Group 1

At Orlando Stadium

South Africa 4 (Nomvete 66, 76, Marumo 30, Mbuthu 90) Mali 1 (Coulibaly 1)

At Rand Stadium

Algeria 2 (Bendebka 34, Hadjelali 80) Uganda 0

Standings

Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points)

South Africa 2 2 0 0 6 1 6

Algeria 2 1 0 1 2 2 3

Uganda 2 1 0 1 2 2 3

Mali 2 0 0 2 1 6 0

Group winners and runners-up qualify for semi-finals

Next matches

Sept 13 - South Africa v

Uganda, Algeria v Mali

Second gold for S Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 12: On an icy day that had swimmers wearing gloves and coats before plunging into the water and spectators wrapped in blankets, South Africa claimed a second gold medal Saturday in the All Africa Games, reports AP.

Michelle Cameron on the host country's second gold, retaining her all-round rhythmic gymnastics title and beating Egypt's Sherin Taama and Yasmin Lofti.

Lofti had started the event as the favorite, but Cameron was in front throughout as she started with 9.425 points for her rope routine. In the ball routine, Lofti lost the ball and scored a disastrous 8.925. Only Taama put any pressure on Cameron after that.

In the end, needing 9.1 for the ribbon routine to at least stay level with Taama, Cameron scored 9.275 for her gold medal tally of 37.550.

"I like the pressure," Cameron said. "It helps me focus and keep me in the zone."

Taama finished with 37.375, and Lofti with 37.087.

To qualify for the Sydney Olympics, Cameron needs to repeat her victory over the Egyptian women at next month's world championships in Tokyo.

The swimming got under way with early-morning preliminary rounds in unseasonably icy weather. Multiple breaststroke world-record holder and double Olympic gold medalist Penny Heyns said she was relieved that her 200-meter final is scheduled for Sunday evening, when warmer weather was forecast.

Also Saturday, Kenya beat Namibia 1-0 in a preliminary women's field hockey match. In netball, South Africa trounced Namibia 67-15.

Problems continued to plague the games, which began on Thursday and end Sept 19.

Weightlifting went ahead in an empty auditorium while officials turned away locals who said they couldn't afford the 12 rands (drs two) entrance fee.

Meanwhile, in baseball, officials let spectators in free because they had run out of tickets. Lesotho beat Ghana 18-4, recovering from its 43-0 loss to South Africa on Thursday.

Authorities, meanwhile, were investigating what caused about 600 children who were to participate in Friday's opening ceremony to contract food poisoning.

Games committee chairman Mtobi Tyamzashe said the services of the caterer would not be suspended.

They have not been found guilty, he said at a press conference.

The 20 children who were hospitalized overnight were released Saturday.

An all-American affair

NEW YORK, Sept 12: French Open champion Andre Agassi recovered from a sluggish start to beat Australian Open champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov for a US Open finals berth and reclaim the world number one ranking, reports AFP.

Second seed Agassi ousted the third-seeded Russian 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-3, Saturday to reach Sunday's final against seventh seed Todd Martin, who beat Cedric Pioline 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 to reach his second Grand Slam final.

"It's really exciting. The US Open final is what it's all it's about," Agassi said. "Todd is playing so well. He's a big guy who serves well, returns well and can dictate play if you don't get a lot of returns."

The victory also means Agassi will replace injured Pete Sampras as world number one in Monday's new ATP rankings. Agassi spent three weeks atop the ratings earlier this year and will be tough to catch in 1999.

Agassi, now in his fourth US Open final, won his only title here in 1994 and sees winning his fifth career Slam title as more important than his rankings boost.

"A man has to have his priorities," Agassi said. "The US Open final is definitely leading that race."

Agassi, who lost to Sampras in July's Wimbledon final, became the first man since 1994 to play in three Slam finals in a row, since Sampras won the 1993 Wimbledon and US Open and 1994 Australian Open titles.

His French Open triumph in June made Agassi only the fifth man to collect the career Grand Slam. Agassi is 34-4 since the start of the French Open.

Agassi has an 11-match win streak and has lost only seven service games in that span entering the championship matchup of 29-year-old Americans at the 14.5-million-dollar hardcourt event.

As a result of Serena Williams' triumph in the women's singles and an all-American men's final, US players will sweep US Open singles titles for the first time since John McEnroe and Martina Navratilova in 1984.

Martin, who survived two five-set matches to get this far, only 96 minutes to reach his first Slam final since a straight-set loss to Sampras at the 1994 Australian Open. Martin is 5-9 against Agassi.

"It'll be a great challenge for me," Martin said. "There's nothing I would rather experience than playing in Grand Slam final against one of the best in the world."

"You don't have to play great. You only have to play better than the other guy. That's what I will try to do."

France's Pioline said Martin is playing at a mighty level.

He played too great. He was hitting very well," Pioline said. "I have never seen him playing like this. If he is able to play that way tomorrow, I think he has a good chance."

Kafelnikov captured the first set in 21 minutes while Agassi struggled with his first serves, connecting on only 36 per cent in the first two sets. But he broke Kafelnikov with a volley winner in the fourth game of the second set and held out to level the match.

Kafelnikov sent backhands long to surrender breaks in the first and last games of the third set to put Agassi in command and netted another backhand in the sixth game of the fourth set for the deciding break.

Martin served 14 aces, made 65 per cent of his first serves and won 43-of-54 first serve points, 80 per cent. He also won six of nine break chances against Pioline and saved five of six break points.

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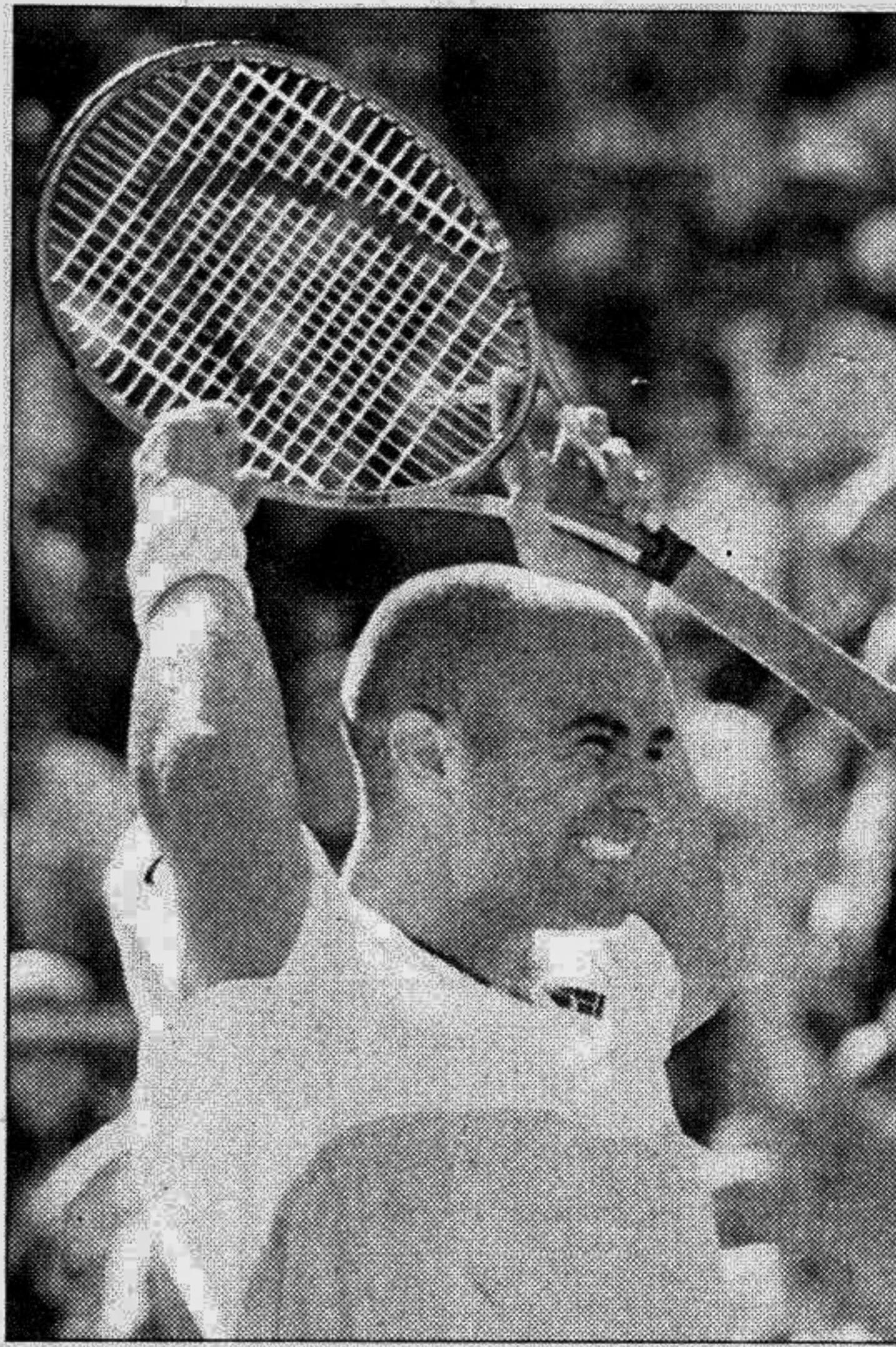
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American Andre Agassi is ecstatic after reaching the US Open final on September 11. —AFP photo

FACTFILE

Factfile on US Open men's singles finalist Andre Agassi of the United States:

Age: 29. Height: 5 feet 11 inches. Weight: 165 pounds. Plays: Right-handed

Career titles: 42

Grand Slam singles titles: 4

US Open seeding: 2

1987: Won first ATP Tour title as wild card in Itaparica, Brazil

1988: Won six titles in seven finals, semi-finalist at French Open and US Open

1989: Won lone title of year in Orlando, Florida, runner-up in Rome

1990: Runner-up at French Open and US Open, won inaugural ATP Tour World Championships, won three other titles and helped US Davis Cup victory over Australia

1991: Won titles in Orlando and Washington, runner-up French Open

1992: Captured first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon, where he beat three-time champions Boris Becker and John McEnroe

1993: Won titles in San Francisco and Scottsdale. Underwent right wrist surgery in December

1994: Won US Open for second Grand Slam singles title. Won four other titles, including Super Nine events in Toronto and Paris, became first player to move from outside top 30 to finish the year at number two in the world

1995: Won Australian Open for third Grand Slam singles title. Won career-high seven titles in 11 finals, compiled 73-9 match record and claimed world number one ranking on April 10. Held number one ranking for 30 weeks. Lost to Pete Sampras in US Open final

1996: Won Super Nine titles in Key Biscayne and Cincinnati, first player to win three Key Biscayne titles, won Olympic gold medal in Atlanta. Held number one ranking for two weeks

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