

Brazil promise strong team for Australia

SYDNEY, Oct 5: Brazil have told Australian organisers they will send a strong national squad to play the Socceros here next month...

Four promoters IMG said Tuesday the two-match tour would proceed after they were assured about the quality of the Brazil team.

The tour has been in doubt since last week when it was learned Brazil had double booked, committing to play a friendly match against Spain in Madrid just two days before they were due to take on Australia.

Australian officials have been concerned that Brazil's superstars would not journey to Australia and instead remain in Europe for the Spanish game while the Brazilian federation (CBF) sent an under-23 Olympic team here to prepare for the Sydney Olympics.

However IMG said the CBF will make an announcement this week, promising a strong team.

"I wanted an assurance they would send their national team and not an Olympic team, they've given me those assurances so the tour will go ahead," IMG managing director Martin Jolly said Tuesday.

"Brazil will not, and never do, announce a squad until two weeks out from a match but the assurance is the games are important to them and they will send a strong squad," he said.

Meanwhile, Australian coach Frank Farina is in Britain trying to mend a rocky relationship between Soccer Australia and British clubs caused by demands over the release of Australian players for international duty.

Farina was also understood to be trying to organise friendlies against European national teams, with Scotland and Wales as prospective opponents, and possibly England if they did not qualify for Euro 2000.

Taliban appeal

KABUL, Oct 5: Taliban sports authorities Tuesday demanded the International Olympic Committee revise a decision which effectively barred Afghan athletes from competing at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, reports AFP.

The headline Islamic rulers also chided the IOC and implied officials had bowed to US pressure after Washington slapped trade sanctions against the militia for harbouring alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden.

The IOC is representing 165 countries of the world and we call on IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch not to be used by one country and for the IOC to revise their decision," sports minister Mulla Abdul Shokour Mutmaen said.

Three days ago the IOC announced that it no longer recognised the Afghan Olympic Committee which is run by the Taliban who control most of Afghanistan after a five-year civil war.

However, the IOC said Afghan athletes would be able to compete in Sydney as individuals and not as representatives of Afghanistan.

Mutmaen rejected this saying any Afghan athlete taking part should be able to fly the plain white flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

"But I don't think the announcement came from the IOC but from pressure from enemy countries who don't want to see peace and security in Afghanistan," he added.

Mutmaen declined to say specifically that the US was behind the IOC decision but the Taliban's secretary general for the Olympics Mohammad Khalid said "it's possible the US sanctions had something to do with this."

In July, Washington froze Taliban bank accounts and imposed trade sanctions as part of its efforts to force the militia into handing over bin Laden who is wanted for a string of crimes.

These include the bombing of two US embassies in east Africa in August 1998 which left more than 200 people dead.

"We have no limitations on sport. The IOC has combined sport and politics when everyone knows they are separate. We and athletes are sorry and we want the IOC to revise this decision."

"This year we put a lot of effort into organising a lot of competition. It's the athletes right to take part and the IOC has usurped their right," Khalid said.

The Taliban had planned to send 15 athletes to Sydney to compete in athletics, boxing and martial arts, and Mutmaen said several athletes were medal winning prospects.

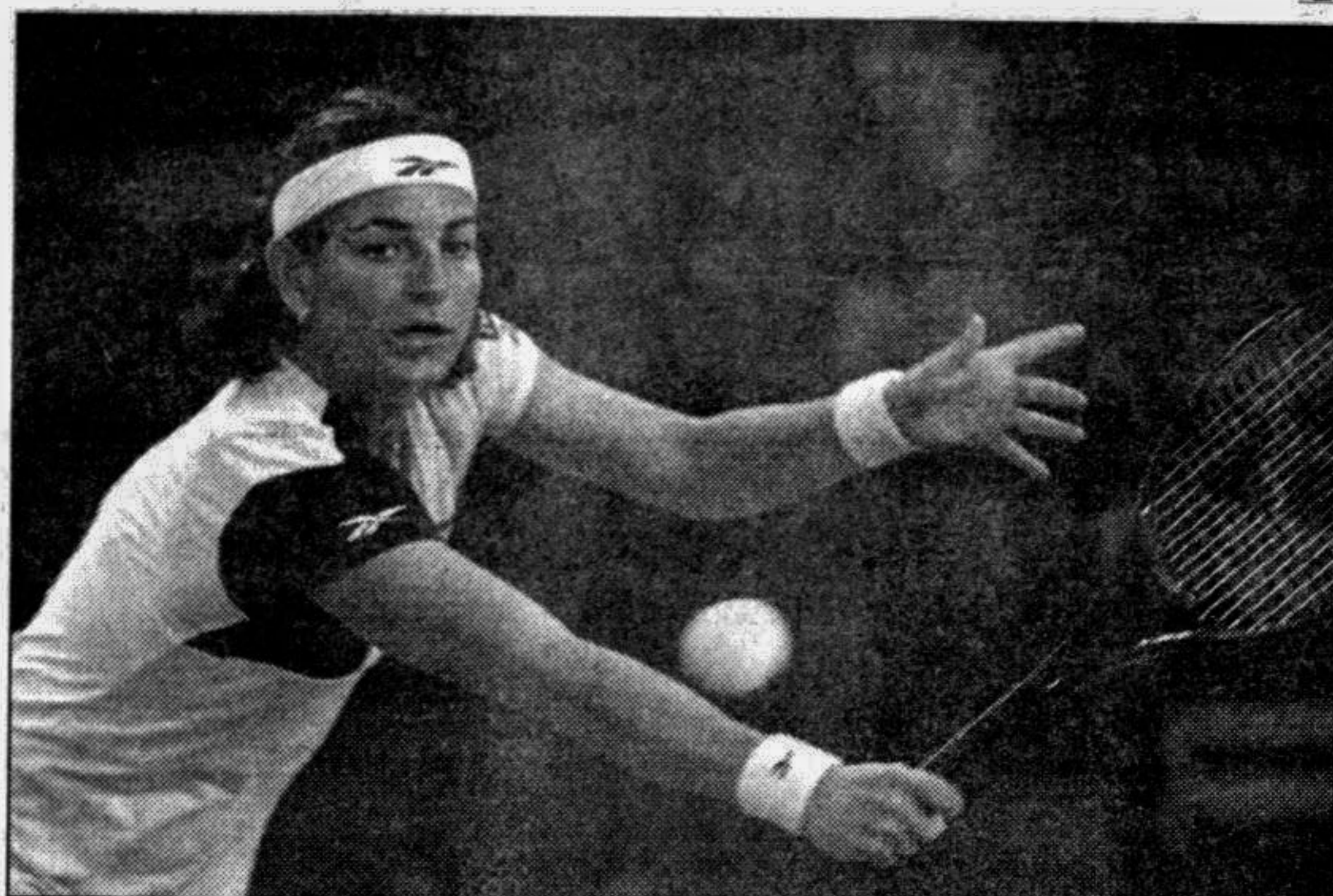
He added that all Afghan athletes were treated with the same esteem and ethnic origin was not an issue, be they Pashtoon, Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen or Hazara.

"But we think the IOC has discriminated against us and are not treating us with the same esteem as other countries," Mutmaen said.

Rafter pulls out of CA Trophy

VIENNA, Oct 5: Patrick Rafter has withdrawn from the CA Trophy next week because of a shoulder injury received at the US Open, reports Reuters.

Tournament boss Guenther Huemer also said yesterday he was still waiting to hear whether last year's winner Pete Sampras would again require a wild card entry, but a positive response was not expected.



Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario stretches to make a return in the match against Russian Elena Likhovtseva at the Filderstadt Grand Prix on October 4. — AFP photo

Desailly scare for France

PARIS, Oct 5: Chelsea defender Marcel Desailly is a doubt for France's biggest game since the World Cup final, he admitted Tuesday, reports AFP.

On Saturday the world champions face Iceland in Paris in their final Group Four European Championship qualifier and France go into that match in third place in the pool behind leaders Ukraine and Russia whose match in Moscow kicks off at the same time.

Desailly missed Chelsea's 5-0 drubbing of European champions Manchester United at the weekend with an injured adductor muscle and admitted his participation against Iceland was in doubt.

Desailly told L'Equipe: "At the moment I can run a bit but it is still painful. For me to be able to play Saturday I must be able to train normally from Wednesday. We must wait and see."

If the Ghanaian-born defender is forced to withdraw his likely replacement against Iceland would be his Chelsea teammate Frank Leboeuf.

France coach Roger Lemerre has already been deprived of the services of Arsenal midfielder Emmanuel Petit and Real Madrid striker Nicolas Anelka through injury while Monaco goalkeeper Fabien Barthez is suspended as is squad player Frederic Dehu, of Barcelona.

Paris St Germain goalkeeper Bernard Lama has been recalled by Lemerre to replace Barthez since the World Cup Lama has only agreed to be selected if he knows he will be in the starting line-up.

If Ukraine and Russia draw in Moscow France could still



MARCEL DESAILLY only agreed to be selected if he knows he will be in the starting line-up.

top the group and qualify automatically if they beat Iceland. But second place and a play-off place is a more realistic hope for the world champions.

But victory is no formality against Iceland, who themselves have a statistical chance of the runners-up spot although that would be an unlikely scenario.

Lemerre, Aime Jacquet's right-hand man during the World Cup campaign, will be well aware that the Scandinavians were very unlucky not to win the Group Four encounter between the teams in Reykjavik, which finished 1-1.

That was Lemerre's first competitive game in charge of the world champions and if fortunes go against him on Saturday the match against the same opponents could be his last.

Pele's son in murder trial

SAO PAULO, Oct 5: Edson Chobli do Nascimento "Edinho", son of Brazilian footballing legend Pele, is set to stand trial on charges of manslaughter here on Tuesday, reports AFP.

The 28-year-old former goalkeeper, who played for Brazilian outfit Santos from 1995-97, was charged along with his co-driver Marcello de Melo following the death of a spectator during an illegal car race in 1992.

Shevchenko on Ronaldo's side

MILAN, Oct 5: AC Milan's hero Andriy Shevchenko took a swipe at the Italian star system on Tuesday, claiming that players like Ronaldo were being built up only to be knocked down, reports AFP.

The 23-year-old Ukrainian set Italian football alight on Sunday with a hat-trick in a 4-4 draw with Lazio that will go down in history here.

It was only Shevchenko's fourth appearance in the Serie A, after joining from Dynamo Kyiv over the summer, and had the predictable effect of star treatment in the media and comparisons with Marco Van Basten.

But Shevchenko warned that he wouldn't be able to make headlines every week and wagged a finger at the way that criticism has been heaped on Ronaldo during his slow return to form.

"It's not as if Ronaldo has suddenly become second rate," he said. "I think that in a month's time he will be back to what he was before."

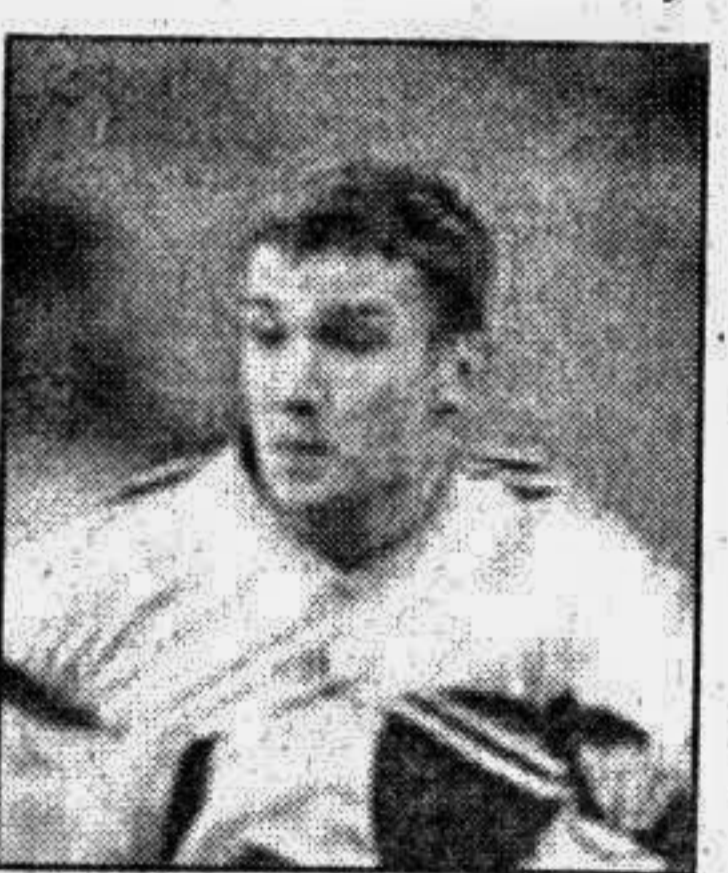
"In my opinion, the problem is not in his legs but in his head, because of all the pressure he's under. I'm not Ronaldo and I try to defend myself."

"But one of the things I don't like is that in Italy everything happens so quickly - someone who scores three goals is a genius but if he doesn't score for two matches he's in crisis."

"Everybody knows that the

Italian championship is difficult, and I'm prepared for the pressure, but I'm not a computer."

Shevchenko also pointed to two Dutchmen who failed to make their mark on this city.



SHEVCHENKO

ex-Inter Dennis Bergkamp, a Double winner with Arsenal, and former AC Milan striker Patrick Kluyvert, a champion in Spain with Barcelona.

"Bergkamp went to England and proved that he is a great footballer," he said.

"And I reckon that if Kluyvert had stayed on for another year in Italy he would have shown his true worth. He's doing that now with Barcelona."

As for the Italian championship, led by current favourites Inter Milan, the Ukrainian said: "We're up there with the others."

"At the moment, Inter have the advantage of not playing in the Champions League. But that's only now, the title is won at the end of the season. I say that we are going to win the championship and the Champions League."

Milan's Euro campaign has been complicated by their home draw with Hertha Berlin, but Shevchenko was optimistic about the second leg on October 20.

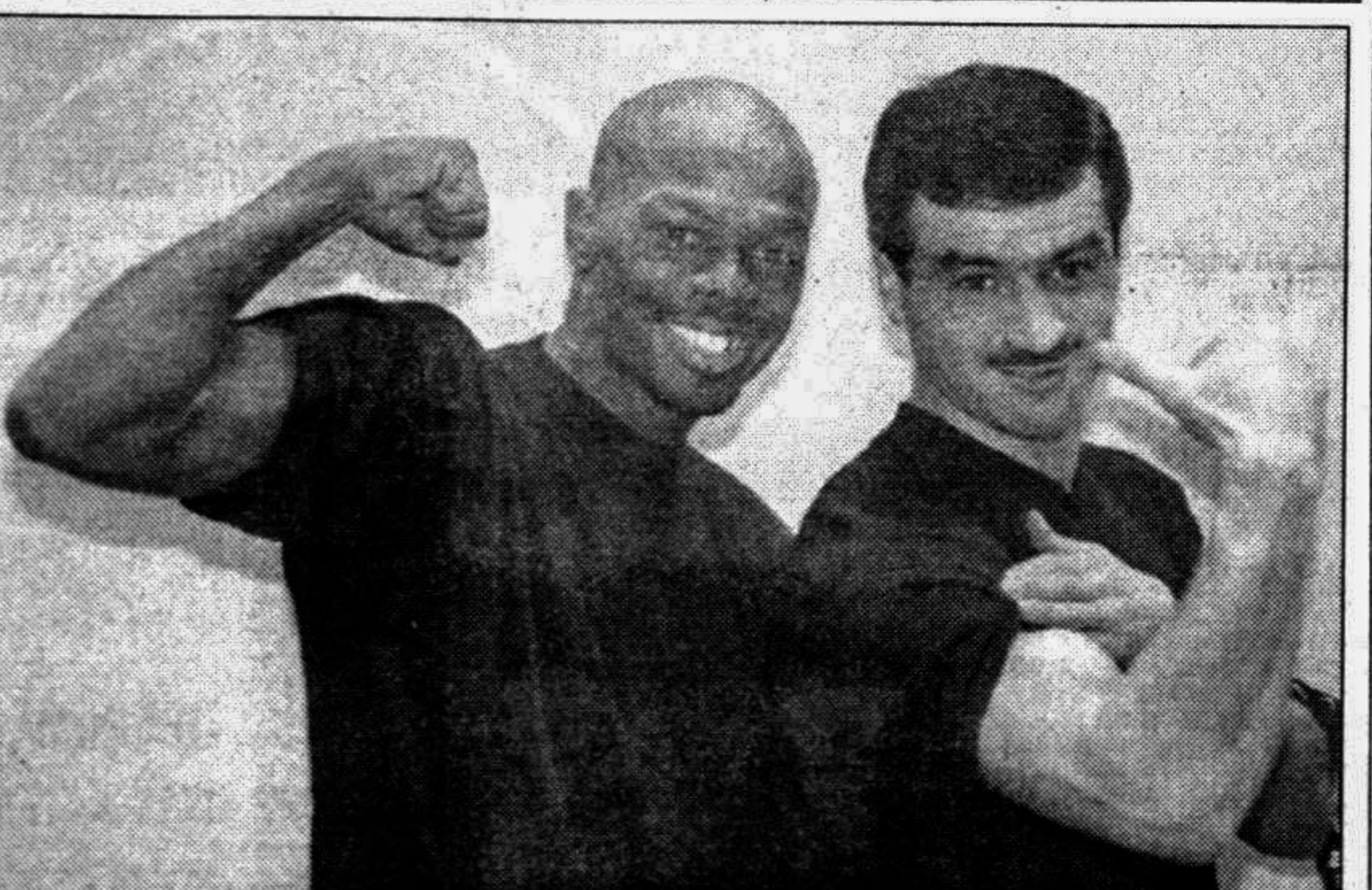
"It will be easier than it was at San Siro," he said. "And then, when I think about the fact that Chelsea beat Manchester United 5-0, I realise that really anything can happen."

Asked if he had any doubts about hosting Chelsea in their Group H clash here on October 26, Shevchenko told the Gazzetta dello Sport simply: "AC Milan are a very good side."

Douillet skips world meet

PARIS, Oct 5: World and Olympic heavyweight judo champion David Douillet of France said yesterday he was withdrawing from the World Championships in Birmingham, England starting on Thursday because of back trouble.

Douillet misses the chance to become the first man to win a fifth world title.



WHO'S GOT THE BIGGER BICEPS: World Boxing Organisation lightweight champion Artur Grigorian (R) of Germany shows off his his best side while his American challenger Michael Clark tries as well during a press conference in Oberhausen, Germany on October 5. — AFP photo

Vieiri voted Italy's best

MILAN, Oct 5: Christian Vieri has been voted last season's best player in Italian football and his former club, Lazio, have been picked as best team - instead of champions AC Milan, reports AFP.

Vieri had a double celebration after his fellow professionals of the Italian players' union rated him best overall player and also best Italian.

Lazio, the club he left for Inter Milan in a world record 50 million dollar move over the summer, were rewarded for their ultimately heart-breaking season by being voted best team. Lazio played the better football but Milan pipped them to the top prize on the final day after Vieri's men suffered a run of defeats in the final weeks.

Vieri, who had left the pitch in tears after failing to land Lazio's first league title for 25 years, admitted on Monday night: "I still wake up sometimes and wonder how on earth we didn't win the league."

"It still seems impossible," said the centre-forward, who is currently preparing for Italy's Euro 2000 qualifier against Belarus.

Recognition for Milan's achievement went instead to Alberto Zaccaroni, who was voted best coach.

Argentina's Gabriel Battistuta, who scored 18 goals in 19 games for Fiorentina before getting injured, was the best foreigner, while AS Roma skipper Francesco Totti, who turned 23 less than a fortnight ago, was rated best young player.

Gianluigi Buffon, who will be between the posts in Minsk on Saturday, was best goalkeeper.

Solid start for Testud

FILDERSTADT, Germany, Oct 5: Sandrine Testud, the defending champion from France, set up a second round clash with Grand Slam Cup winner Serena Williams, after defeating Chinese Li Ting 6-3, 6-2 at the 520,000-dollar Filderstadt Grand Prix here Monday, reports AFP.

Testud needed only 68 minutes to see off her American opponent, breaking serve three times without reply.

Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario's decline continued with a 6-1, 6-4 defeat at the hands of Russia's Elena Likhovtseva in just 62 minutes, while former finalist Natasha Zvereva saved two match points to see off French lucky loser Anne-Gaëlle Sidot 7-6, 2-6, 7-5.

Williams has caused a stir off court by pulling out of next week's Swisscom Challenge in Zurich, electing instead to return to Florida at the end of the week to begin a college course in fashion and design. This is the fifth occasion, in 1993, that Williams has taken a leave with a draw from an event on the WTA Tour, resulting in a reduction in her end-of-year bonus pool prize money.

In a statement, the WTA confirmed they would not be taking further action against the player, but would make every effort to avoid similar conflicts in future.

Williams, who defeated Rubin, was pleased with the way she began her defence against Rubin. She captured the only break of serve in the sixth game of the opening set, before racing into a 4-0 lead in the second.

Afterwards she explained she had taken a while to adapt to the fast indoor surface after playing in French league matches over the weekend.

"The first match here is always difficult," she said, "but I am pleased with the way I served and I kept up my concentration throughout."

"I don't feel any extra pressure as defending champion and I don't expect to win the tournament. Serena is probably the best player in the world at the moment, but I will do my best to win."

Eight of the world's top 10 players are acting at Filderstadt, with Martina Hingis, Lindsay Davenport, Williams and Mary Pierce all receiving first round byes. Jana Novotna, who retires at the end of the tournament, faces qualifier Silvia Farina in her opening match on Tuesday.

Newcastle to compensate Dalglish

LONDON, Oct 5: English Premiership club Newcastle United Monday agreed to pay Kenny Dalglish compensation for sacking him as manager more than a year ago, reports AFP.

The figure is being kept secret but Dalglish, now Celtic's director of football operations, said in a statement that he was happy with the outcome of the tribunal, which was arbitrated by the Premier League. "I am pleased that everything has been resolved amicably," said Dalglish, who has been chasing compensation since being replaced as manager at St James' Park by Ruud Gullit last year.

"I'd like to thank the players and staff who worked with me at Newcastle for their support and dedication."

"I would also like to thank John Barrett of the League Managers' Association and my trade union, MSF, who supported my claim."

"I wish Bobby Robson and the Newcastle team every success and look forward to concentrating on fulfilling the ambitions of Celtic for the future."

Dalglish and Newcastle issued a joint statement outside the Premier League headquarters with both camps saying they were satisfied with the outcome.

Seeds set out smoothly

SHANGHAI, Oct 5: A pair of seeds scored one-way wins Monday to reach the second round of the 350,000-dollar Shanghai Heineken Open, losing just seven games between them, reports AFP.

Fourth seed Jan-Michael Gambill of the United States and Swede Jonas Bjorkman, seeded fifth on the outdoor hardcourt at the Xian Xia Tennis Centre, newly constructed for the event only last year, both came through comfortably.

Gambill, trying to get his ATP Tour ranking back into the top 50, defeated Chinese player Yu Wang 6-0, 6-1. Gambill could do little else but call

his rapid-fire win, which took less than an hour, "a quick match".

Bjorkman, who stood in the top five on the ATP rankings two seasons ago but has since fallen into the 50s, started his week in Shanghai by ousting American Paul Goldstein 6-4, 6-2.

Bjorkman admitted that his flight from Europe started to catch up with him on court against Goldstein, but the Swede recovered to book his trip into the second round.

"I started going to sleep out there," said Bjorkman. "But I quickly woke up."

The match was the first for the Swede since the US Open almost a month ago. Despite his long layoff, Bjorkman said: "I felt confident with my game."

But I'll admit I was nervous at the start."

In other opening-day results, Croatian Ivan Ljubicic, who scored the biggest success of his career at Monte Carlo with an upset of Yevgeny Kafelnikov, dealt America a second blow with his knockout of Justin Gimelstob 7-6, 6-3.

Filipino-American Cecil Mamiit came good for the States, beating Swede Fredrik Jonsson 6-3, 3-6, 6-2. John Van Lotum of the Netherlands kept China nil for two matches, stopping Ben-Qiang Zhu 6-4, 6-2.

Byron Black will have to celebrate his 30th birthday later this week away from the singles court after suffering an upset at the hands of up-and-coming Max Mirnyi of Belarus. The veteran from Zimbabwe was beaten 6-3, 2-6, 6-4.

Black had been hoping to aim for another Asian trophy this year after winning the title in April in Chennai, India.

At 22 years, three months, Mirnyi is the youngest player in the 32-man field.

Mirnyi started the year ranked nearly 300th in the world and has moved smartly upwards to inside the top 100.

He played his first semifinal last spring, beating Jim Courier at Orlando. He also holds mixed doubles crowns at the US Open and Wimbledon from 1998 with Serena Williams.

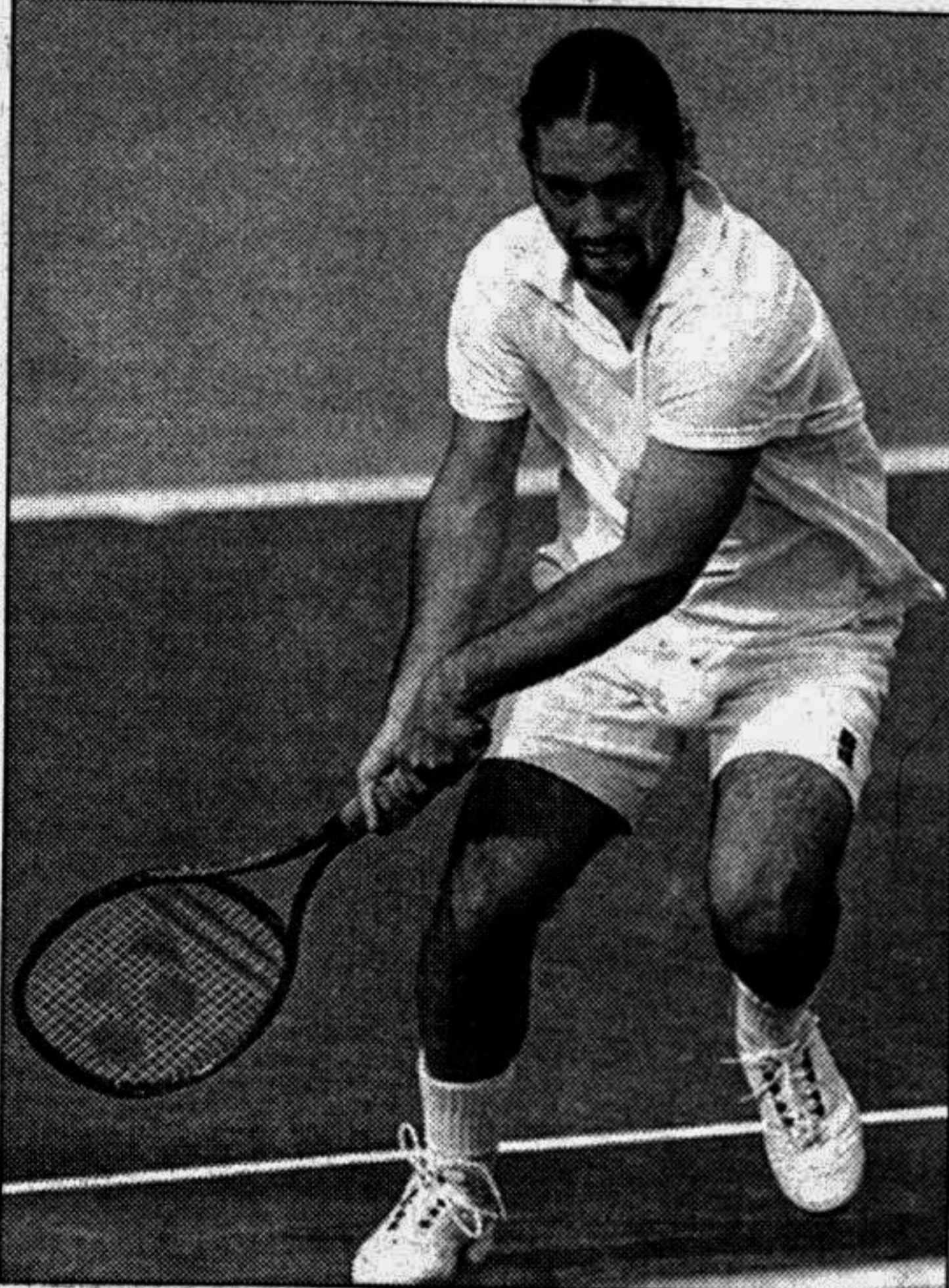
Chile's Marcelo Rios, who is making his debut here, is top seed, with second Magnus Norman second. Both will be in action on Tuesday. Rios plays his first match against Italy's Laurence Tielemans.

Norman has won a Tour-leading four titles this year, the same number as superstars Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras.

World number eight Rios and defending champion Michael Chang of the United States both fell in their first-round doubles matches, however.

Chang, who is seeded sixth in the tournament, has not won a title since last year's Heineken Open. The former world number two -- the crowd favourite here in part due to his Chinese ancestry -- has fallen in the ATP rankings to 64.

But the 27-year-old American says he is far from retirement and is looking to turn his fortunes around with strong play here. He will face a qualifier, compatriot Brian MacPhie, on Tuesday.



Chilean Marcelo Rios in action against Laurence Tielemans at the Heineken Open in Shanghai yesterday. Rios defeated his Italian opponent 6-2, 6-1. — AFP photo

Johnson being hopeful

SYDNEY, Oct 5 (AFP): Double Olympic champion Michael Johnson is supremely confident of repeating his golden 200-400 metre double in Sydney next year.

The American superstar, who took his first look at the Olympic Stadium Tuesday while on a promotional tour for the 2001 Goodwill Games in Brisbane, also believes people should concentrate on performances like his rather than a small band of drug cheats.

"I actually think that whatever we can do to stop people from talking about it so much and making it seem like it's so much more and there are so many more athletes than there are, that's what I'd be interested in," he said.

"Some guy who nobody hardly knows about tests positive and it's on the front page of every major newspaper in the world and that's creating a situation where people think that everyone's on drugs -- people think that it's more than it really is."

"What percentage of the athletes test positive every year? We don't even know because no one bothers to even to take a look at that's a percentage. Everyone just jumps on this guy tested positive."

"Certainly the pressure should be on the federations to do all they can, but I think that (the number of athletes using performance-enhancing drugs) is exaggerated."

The 32-year-old won the 400m at the August World Championships at Seville.

"I think going into Seville, the sport had a big shadow over it because of all the positive drug tests," Johnson said.

"There were a lot of great performances there, including

mine, and I think that's a step in the right direction."

"Athletes like myself who can compete well drug-free can balance that thing out."

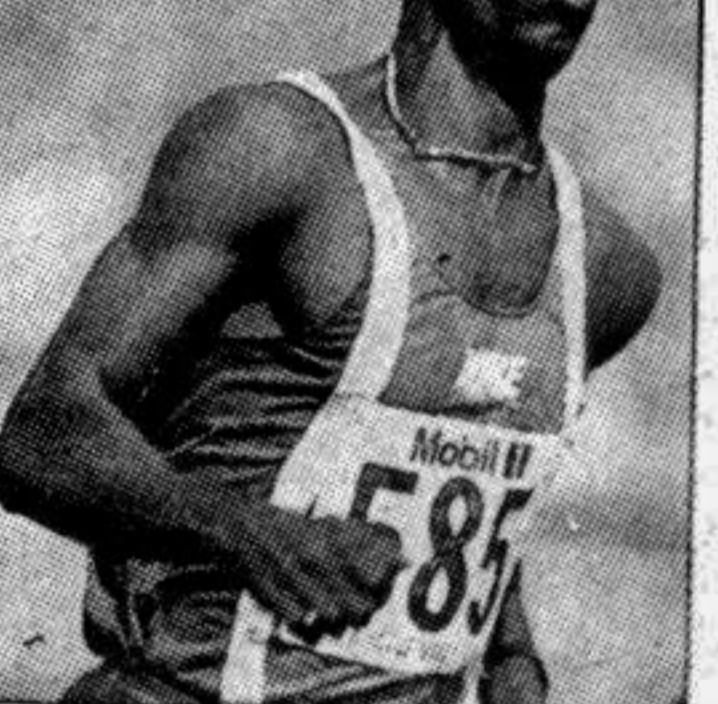
Johnson, who holds the world 200m record of 19.32sec and the world 400m mark of 43.18sec, believes he can go even faster.

"It's not something that I'm planning. It's just something that I know that I can do," he said.

"Whether or not it happens, who knows. I just go out there and do the best I can."

And he sees no reason why he can't repeat the double of Atlanta.

"I'm extremely confident," he said. "I'm running faster now than I've done in my life."



MICHAEL JOHNSON

"Of course it was difficult in '96 and it'll be difficult next year, but I perform well under that kind of pressure and I'm confident going in there, knowing what I'm doing, having experienced it before in '96 and take that and bringing it here."

"I'm just hoping to win and basically that's the extent of it."

That's all I want to do. I don't care what I run, any of that. I just want to win."

Johnson said he had no plans to quit in the near future.

"Everyone asks me why am I still doing it. I enjoy what I do. It's a great sport and I can still run, so there's no reason for me to stop at this point," he said.

2006 Asiad bidding Indonesia withdraws

JAKARTA, Oct 5: Indonesia finally withdrew from the bidding for the 2006 Asian Game, and supported Malaysia's bidding, State Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Agung Laksono said, reports Xinhua.

Laksono was quoted by the Media Indonesia today as saying that the decision was made by cabinet meeting last week.

He said President BJ Habibie told the meeting that Indonesia must support Malaysia bidding for the 2006 Asian Games.

Earlier September, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad asked Habibie during their meeting in the Kuala Lumpur to reconsider Indonesia's bid for the Asiad and throw its support behind Malaysia.

During the meeting, Mahathir expressed Malaysia's desire not to compete against Indonesia in the bidding, preferring instead to have Indonesia support in a show of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) unity.

Besides Malaysia, Qatar, Syria, India, Hong Kong and Uzbekistan also expressed their willingness to host the 2006 Asian Games. The host will be named during the Olympics Committee of Asia executive meeting in October next year.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

Y'X PDK OQDO PJILNQLNTLP
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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE AMUSING DENTIST WOULD OFTEN CALL HIS OFFICE THE DRAWING ROOM.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals Y

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will 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.