

Australian Open changes rules

MELBOURNE, Oct 7: The threat of defaulting a match will no longer hang over the heads of the world's top players at the Australian Open under experimental rule changes being introduced next year, reports AFP.

Instead of automatically losing the match if warned three times, organisers said a first offence would be warning, a point would be lost for a second offence and a game lost if cautioned for a third time.

A game will be defaulted for every other warning thereafter.

"They won't feel so inhibited," tournament director Paul McNamee said at the official Open launch in Melbourne Thursday.

In other rule changes, the first rest break will be after the third game of the first set, instead of the first.

And the 90 second changeover between sets has been increased to two minutes.

McNamee said prizemoney had been increased by five per cent.

The 2000 Open, which runs from January 17 to 30, will carry a total prize pool of 12.33 million dollars (8.0 million US).

The winner of the men's singles will pocket 755,000 and the women's winner 717,000 dollars.

McNamee expects the top 20 men and women players to be in Melbourne for the first Grand Slam of the new millennium.

Pete Sampras, who missed the US Open because of injury, will be back to try and beat Roy Emerson's record of 12 Grand Slam wins.

Sampras missed the last Australian Open citing fatigue.

Pat could play in Davis Cup final

MELBOURNE, Oct 7: Australian number one Pat Rafter is expected to be fit for the Davis Cup final against France in December, Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard said Thursday, reports AFP.

"We believe his injury will be fixed in time to play in a tournament or two in Europe before the Davis Cup final with France," he said at the official launch of the 2000 Australian Open.

Australia's convincing semi-final win over Russia in September was without leading players Rafter and Mark Philippoussis.

Captain John Newcombe and coach Tony Roche face a difficult time selecting the squad for Australia's first final since 1993 with Lleyton Hewitt and 28-year-old rookie Wayne Arthurs performing so magnificently.

At this stage they could have Rafter, Philippoussis, Hewitt and Arthurs and doubles pair Mark Woodforde and Sandon Stolle all available and eager to be part of the final while clay specialist Richard Fromberger is also likely to come into contention.

"We'll just sit back and look at the surface we're playing on, which will probably be clay, and then we'll go accordingly from there," said Newcombe recently.

Rafter, who has been working on his injured right shoulder since breaking down in the US Open, would be an automatic choice if fit, although Australian Open tournament director Paul McNamee was cautious Thursday.

Ronaldo scared to run

CHICAGO, Oct 7 (AP): The terrifying phone call from home came shortly after Ronaldo da Costa arrived in Rio de Janeiro last month for a race.

Be careful, a friend warned the world-record holder in the marathon, the kidnappers are looking for you again.

This was the third time in two weeks kidnappers had come for him, and it was too much. Da Costa found his girlfriend, and they got on a flight for San Diego the next morning.

There was no time for the race, no time to go and say goodbye to his family and friends in Brazil. There wasn't even time to pack.

"I don't understand why," Da Costa said Wednesday through an interpreter. "I'm very innocent. I'm trying to do my job and somebody is trying to kidnap me. It is the biggest shock I've had."

"I'm scared to go back to Brazil."

Da Costa, who will race for the first time since the kidnapping attempts in the Chicago Marathon on Oct. 24, has lived a frenzied life since September 1998, when he won the Berlin Marathon in 2 hours, 6 minutes, 5 seconds. That time shattered Belenayre Denissimo's record that had stood for 10 years by a full 45 seconds.

He became an instant celebrity in Brazil, even being dubbed "Ronaldinho" — the little Ronaldo — to distinguish him from soccer star Ronaldo. A Brazilian television crew flew to Berlin and accompanied him home, and then flew him by helicopter to his rural hometown of Descoberto.

Reporters followed him wherever he went, and he was on television all the time. Fans were constantly asking for a picture or autograph. He even got stopped when he was training.

"He's a very likable person," said his agent, Luis Felipe Posso. "We went to Monaco last

November and after we checked into the hotel we went for a walk. There was a group of Brazilian tourists and everybody recognized him."

the Chicago Marathon, even though the course sets up perfectly for him, fast and flat just like Berlin's.

But last week, he moved to



RONALDO DA COSTA

Boulder, Colorado, and started running again.

"My mind is clean and I'm ready to go," Da Costa said. "I think I can perform a good race, but I recognize I'm not in the same shape as I was before the kidnapping attempt."

"I'm focusing on training and doing my best," he added. "I'm in very good mental shape, though my physical shape is 10 percent less than before."

Da Costa is uncomfortable talking about the kidnapping attempts. Besides wanting to forget about them, he knows the suspects were never caught and he worries about the family he left in Brazil.

Da Costa was so shaken by the kidnapping attempts he withdrew from the Great North Run, a half-marathon that Sunday in Newcastle, England. He could barely think about running, let alone a race.

He and his girlfriend spent a week in San Diego, trying to digest what had happened and figure out what to do next. He thought about dropping out of

"I'd like to say here," he said. "I have peace of mind."

The match will be played in doors on hard court at the 5,000-seat City Sports Centre in Harare.

The atmosphere will be electric," Chingoka said.

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years ago. The team is anchored by the Black brothers, Byron and Wayne, who normally play all singles and doubles matches.

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Testud ousts Williams

FILDERSTADT, Germany, Oct 7: Defending champion Sandrine Testud staged a remarkable comeback to defeat US Open champion Serena Williams 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 and reach the quarterfinals of the 520,000-dollar Filderstadt Gran Prix here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Frenchwoman trailed 4-2 in the second set and 5-1 in the third, before rallying to win the last six games of the match against the number three seed.

There were no problems for the top two seeds, Martina Hingis of Switzerland, and Lindsay Davenport of the United States, both easing into the quarterfinals with easy second round victories.

Williams needed only 43 minutes to overwhelm Italian qualifier Silvia Farina 6-0, 6-1, while Hingis took just six minutes longer to defeat American Jennifer Capriati 6-4, 6-0.

Mary Pierce of France, was another second round winner, although the number four seed needed almost two and a half hours to battle past Natasha Zvereva of Belarus 7-6, 5-7, 6-4.

Williams dominated the opening set against Testud, and looked poised for a comfortable victory when she broke twice to lead 3-0 in the second.

As 27-year-old Testud began to raise her level, errors crept into her 18-year-old opponent's game, and the Frenchwoman won four games in a row to level the match.

The American again broke twice to lead 5-1 in the final set, only to lapse into error and allow her opponent to claim an unlikely victory.

Afterwards Testud said: "At 5-1 down in the final set I was thinking let's try and win my serve and see what I can do on her's. She then gave me some opportunity and I went for it."

Kafelnikov, Rusedski progress

BASLE, Switzerland, Oct 7: Australian Open champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov kept alive his goal of ending the season as the world's top-ranked player with a victory over American Vincent Spadea on Wednesday in the opening round of the Swiss Indoors, reports AP.

Winner of last week's Grand Slam Cup, third-seeded Greg Rusedski of Britain cleared the first hurdle in the final set, only to lapse into error and allow his opponent to claim an unlikely victory.

Afterwards Testud said: "At 5-1 down in the final set I was thinking let's try and win my serve and see what I can do on her's. She then gave me some opportunity and I went for it."

Kafelnikov, seeded second, overcame a false start to defeat Spadea 6-3, 7-5, keeping pace with French and US Open champion Andre Agassi in the fierce battle for the No 1 year-end ranking.

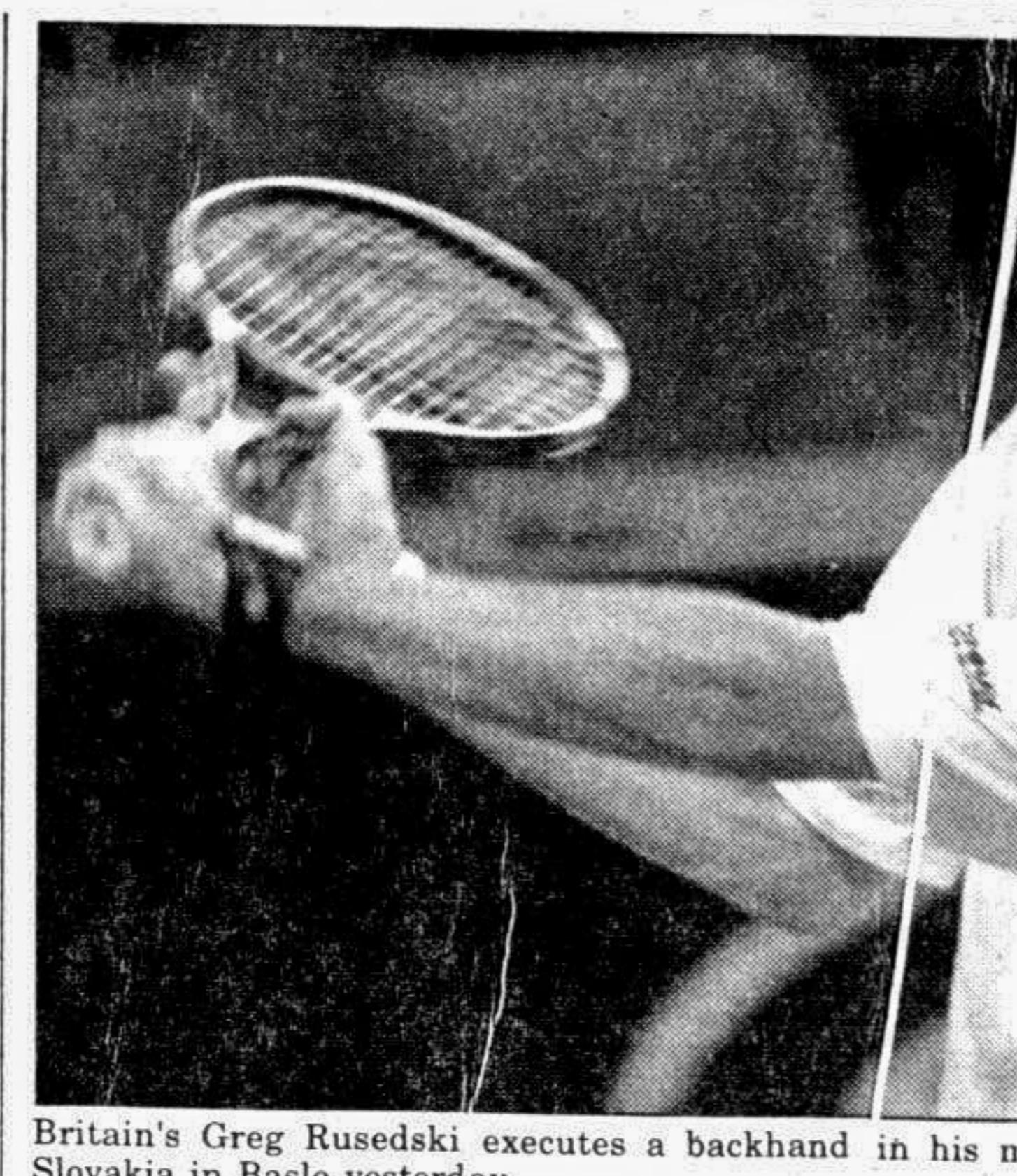
The 25-year-old Russian lost his opening serve, handing Spadea a 1-0 lead.

Rusedski avenged his loss to Santoro in Doha (Qatar) last year, defeating the Frenchman 7-6, 6-2 to advance to the second round.

"I'd never beaten Fabrice in my career yet," joked Rusedski, the champion in Basel in 1997. "I was really out to get my revenge over Fabrice."

"I was really pleased with the way I played. It was some of my best tennis."

In their first round play, Hicham Arazi of Morocco, ranked 40th, upset seventh-seeded Nicolas Lapentti of Ecuador 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, and Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty trounced Andrei Pavel of Romania 6-0, 6-2.



Britain's Greg Rusedski executes a backhand in his match against Dominik Hrbaty of Slovakia in Basle yesterday.

— AFP photo

Norman survives a scare



SHANGHAI, Oct 7: Swede Magnus Norman had to struggle through three sets at the 350,000-dollar Heineken Open to dismiss a challenger hungry for victory after going winless for the first four months of 1999, reports AFP.

Norman, seeded second and holder of four titles this year, finally defeated Peter Wessels of the Netherlands 6-7, 7-5, 7-6 in two hours, 12 minutes at the Xian Xia Tennis Centre.

Wessels, ranked number 82, stands 12-12 for the season. He did not win a match until mid-April at Chennai, India, where he reached the semifinals.

Norman started levels with Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras in the chase for titles after winning three on clay and one on hard courts.

The Dutchman won the opening set and Norman had to go on an 10-point tear late in the second to stay in contention and force a third.

That set also went to a tiebreaker, with Norman winning through on his first match point with a putaway in the footstep of his two older brothers.

He showed his potential this summer at Wimbledon, winning the first round over Frenchman

The Asian Games gold medalist was dominating on serve against his frustrated European opponent, whose flustered play and unforced errors made it all the easier for Srichaphan to move ahead.

Srichaphan, 20, is the third member of his family to hold Thailand's number one ranking, following in the footsteps of his two older brothers.

The meeting, which lasted about an hour in Upton's offices here, ended with no time set for an appearance by the IOC chief before a US Congress hearing before two US IOC representatives to a Senate hearing earlier this year.

The IOC has been warned that US lawmakers would consider taking action against the IOC without major reforms being adopted.

Upton, a Michigan Republican Representative, had threatened to subpoena Samaranch to testify after the IOC leader sent two US IOC representatives to a Senate hearing earlier this year.

The money-for-votes scandal touched off in Salt Lake City has led to the ouster of several IOC members and a probe into dealings for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic bidding has uncovered more violations of IOC gift-giving rules.

connected to 1996 Atlanta Olympic bidding, Upton spokesman Dave Woodruff said.

Samaranch has said he is unable to appear until after IOC meetings December 11-12 at which he plans to complete reforms in the wake of the scandal. The US Congress is adjourned until January by that time.

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Former Senator George Mitchell's examination into the Salt Lake City 2002 Olympic bid scandal included suggestions of elections and term limits for IOC members and an oversight committee outside the IOC's control.

Threatened US congressional actions against the IOC for failing to pass sufficient reform include tariffs on firms sponsoring or signing deals with the IOC, in effect shutting off a major portion of IOC income.

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Top seed Marcelo Rios reached the quarters on Wednesday and plays Australian Todd Woodbridge.

The tournament is the first of two straight weeks of tennis in Asia and will be followed by another Heineken event in Singapore next week.

No date yet for IOC boss

WASHINGTON, Oct 7: United States Congressman Fred Upton met with International Olympic Committee general Francois Carrard but no date was reached for IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch to appear here, reports AFP.

The meeting, which lasted about an hour in Upton's offices here, ended with no time set for an appearance by the IOC chief before a US Congress hearing before two US IOC representatives to a Senate hearing earlier this year.

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