

## Daei blasts Bayern

HONG KONG, Oct 11: Iranian international striker Ali Daei has criticised former club Bayern Munich, saying the club's management bows to media pressure when it comes to team selection, reports Reuters.

Daei, who scored both goals in Hertha Berlin's 2-1 European Champions' League win over Chelsea, was quoted in the Asian magazine AFC News as saying that his lack of appearances for Bayern was down to coach Ottmar Hitzfeld bowing to journalists' opinions.

"I wanted to play more but at Bayern I think that names play for the team not players," said Daei. "In Bayern journalists pick the team but in Berlin if I train well then I play and the trainer picks the team. At Bayern there's too much pressure from the media."

Daei joined Hertha from Bayern during the summer in a deal worth 3.7 million dollars, the highest fee paid for an Asian player, and has scored three times in the Champions' League.

His form this year is in marked contrast to last season when he played just over 20 matches, mainly as a substitute, and scored six times.

"Berlin is good for me," said Daei who was in Hitzfeld's squad for the European Cup final last season but was not used.

"They're not a big club like Bayern but the club have a lot of good players and a good coach. Everyone is friendlier than at Bayern and I think all the players here are friends."

"In Berlin we don't have the same problems as in Bayern. There's not the same attention from the media and I think I'll find it easier to work there."

However, Daei stressed that his time spent at the club dubbed "FC Hollywood" was not all doom and gloom.

"Last year wasn't bad for me," he said. "Last year I learned so many things and I played with good players in a big club and I think that now I'm a better player. I learned so many things from players like Lothar Matthaus."

## Iran, Denmark friendly drawn

COPENHAGEN, Oct 11: Iranian goalkeeper Hadi Tabatabaei and Danish counterpart Peter Schmeichel were in top form Sunday as the teams played a scoreless tie in a friendly match, reports AP.

The Danes had five scoring chances in the opening half, the first one after 15 minutes when Tabatabaei saved Chelsea midfielder Bjarne Guldbeck's shot.

Minutes later, Ali Daei — one of Iran's best players who plays for German club Hertha Berlin — tested Schmeichel with a header. Iranian forward Mehdi Mahdavi later dribbled through the Danish defense, but was stopped by Schmeichel.

The Danish goalie made his best save of the game in the 68th minute, blocking the ball after three Iranians were left unmarked by the Danish defense.

Ebbe Sand, a member of Denmark's successful World Cup team in France last year, came close in the 76th minute as the Schalke striker's shot flew just wide of the post.

In the 71st minute, Belgian referee Eric Blaireau booked Ali Mousavi of Iran.

It was the second time the two countries met. In 1972, Denmark won 4-0 over Iran in the Olympic tournament.

## Andre, Yevgeny enter Colonial Classic

MELBOURNE, Oct 11: World number one Andre Agassi, winner of the French and US Opens, and Australian Open holder and second-ranked Yevgeny Kafelnikov will head the field at the Colonial Classic here in January, reports AFP.

Pete Sampras, the Wimbledon winner who will try to break Australian Roy Emerson's record of 12 slams at the Australian Open, is on standby for the tournament which is the lead-up event to the Australian Open starting January 17.

Australian No 1 Pat Rafter, who briefly held the world No 1 spot this year, is also in the eight-man field for the January 12-15 event, as well as former Wimbledon champion Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands, defending champion Thomas Enqvist of Sweden and German Nicolas Pietrangeli.

Colonial Classic tournament director Colin Stubs said Monday the final two places in the field would be filled within the next few weeks.

Sampras is recovering from a back injury which forced him to withdraw from the US Open, but has said he plans to play all the Grand Slams next year and the Super 9 tournaments.

"Until he sees how his injury is going, he is not prepared to commit to the events which prepare him for the Grand Slams," Stubs said.

It will be three or four weeks before we know if he plays the Colonial Classic but we are saving a place for him," he said.

Apart from his double Grand Slam year, Agassi has also won in Hong Kong and Washington and was a finalist at Wimbledon and Los Angeles.

## Army v'ball

Three more robin league matches of the annual Army volleyball championship were held yesterday at the Momen Shahi Cantonment, reports UNB.

Savar Area defeated Bogra Area while Rangpur Area beat Dhaka Signals and Comilla Area outplayed Air Defence Artillery by 3-1 sets.



England captain Alan Shearer scores his side's first goal with an overhead kick against Belgium in their Euro 2000 qualifier on October 10. England won 2-1. — AFP photo

## Lalas calls it a day



KANSAS CITY, Missouri, Oct 11: Defender Alexi Lalas, a key player in the resurgence of international soccer in the United States and one of the first marquee players of Major League Soccer, has retired, reports AFP.

Lalas, 29, made the announcement after his MLS team Kansas City fell 1-0 to the Los Angeles Galaxy Saturday night.

Lalas was a starting defender for the United States in the 1994 World Cup, when the national team reached the second round for the first time since 1930 and the second time in six World Cup appearances.

But the 6-foot-3-inch defender, easily recognizable by his long red hair and goatee, also was one of the problem players on the 1998 squad, which had a disastrous showing in France and finished last in the 32-nation tournament.

Lalas was one of the most outspoken critics of coach Steve Sampson after being benched following Team USA's 2-0 loss in the first game of group play.

"This is simply a question of following my heart and thus makes it more difficult to explain to people why or how I came to this decision," Lalas said.

"At 29, I definitely feel that I could continue to play for some time, but this is not about age or ability. It is a personal choice and something that I feel is right at this moment in my life."

Sampson was fired after the 1998 World Cup, but two-time Olympian Lalas has made few appearances for the national team under new coach Bruce Arena, who is preparing for 2002 World Cup qualifying.

Lalas also is the only American player to appear during the modern era in Serie A of the prestigious Italian soccer league, playing for Padova in the 1994-95 season and half of the 1995-96 campaign.

He returned to the United States in 1996 and relentlessly served as a spokesman for the MLS, which continues to try and create a niche in the country.

ALEXI LALAS

## Zoff on shaky ground



MILAN, Oct 11: His bags may have arrived in Rome, but Dino Zoff has left his much of his credibility behind at Minsk airport last weekend, reports AFP.

Italy qualified for the Euro 2000 finals, but their woeful performance in a 0-0 draw with Belarus and the savagery by the Italian press have both undermined their tetchy team coach.

Faced with a team ranked 100th in the world, the Italians who claim to have the most skillful soccer league in the world could only resort to booting innumerable high balls into the penalty area for 90 minutes.

All of them were wasted against a modest but well-organized defense as Italy's long-standing weaknesses in midfield once again came home to roost; they have no world-class creative men.

France's Zinedine Zidane (Juventus), Portugal's Manuel Rui Costa (Fiorentina), Argentina's Juan Sebastian Veron

(Lazio) and Croatian Zvonimir Boban (AC Milan) are only Italian on Sundays.

As a result, Christian Vieri and Filippo Inzaghi never even looked like scoring, deprived of the defence-splitting passes they receive at weekends.

Zoff's response to the crisis has been two-fold, to claim that the criticism is exaggerated and to put his faith in the creative but erratic skills of Alessandro Del Piero and Francesco Totti.

Both men have enormous talent as playmakers, but neither of them have ever shown it in a national shirt.

A mis-placed faith in Del Piero at the World Cup finals cost Zoff's predecessor, Cesare Maldini, his job and the Juventus star has yet to fully recover from a year out through injury.

Totti has been on exceptional form for AS Roma for the past two years, but has largely failed to deliver it on national service.

Now Zoff has a few friendly matches to find out some new answers or Italy face a Euro 2000 that could be every bit as

disappointing as France 98.

"The time has come to carry out a few experiments," Zoff said. "But I don't want to hear people going on about creative genius in such general terms. Creative genius is not an end in itself."

"There's Totti, and there may be others, we'll have to see. But I can see that he is improving all the time."

"And I expect a lot too from Del Piero because someone like him, if he's fit, can decide a match, whether it's for Juventus or for the national side."

With present and past world champions France and Germany only scraping into the finals, Zoff was comforted by the fact that his team were not alone in suffering over the weekend.

"Spain look to be the best team," he said. "But them aside, I think we are on the same level as the others."

"I don't know if we'll be among the favourites in June, but predictions don't count for much. It's what happens on the pitch that counts."

## Lemerre preparing to leave?



PARIS, Oct 11: Speculation intensified Sunday about the future of Roger Lemerre as coach to the French national side after a series of bizarre - and sometimes surreal - remarks made by Lemerre to the media in the 24 hours since his side secured qualification for the 2000 European Championships, reports AFP.

Equally ambiguous remarks from French Football Federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet have fuelled rumours that all is not well despite the world champions qualifying automatically as Group Four winners.

France's nerve-racking 3-2 victory over Iceland and Ukraine's bizarre 1-1 draw with Russia in Moscow together ensured France prevailed despite a less-than-convincing campaign.

But Lemerre astonished journalists at the post-match press conference with some ambiguous remarks. He said: "I have fulfilled my mission. After today I am and will remain the biggest supporter of French football and the French team."

Refusing to take questions, the normally genial Lemerre, sombre throughout, then walked out of the conference.

On Sunday he fielded questions but was even more vague about his desire to continue in the post he inherited from Aime Jacquet after France's 3-0 World Cup Final victory over Brazil.

Asked if he would still be leading France for their next match, a friendly with Croatia on November 13, Lemerre said: "God only knows."

He revealed he would be seeking talks with Simonet and when asked how long his "period of reflection" would last said "I don't know."

On French TV channel TF1's Telefoot show Sunday he came

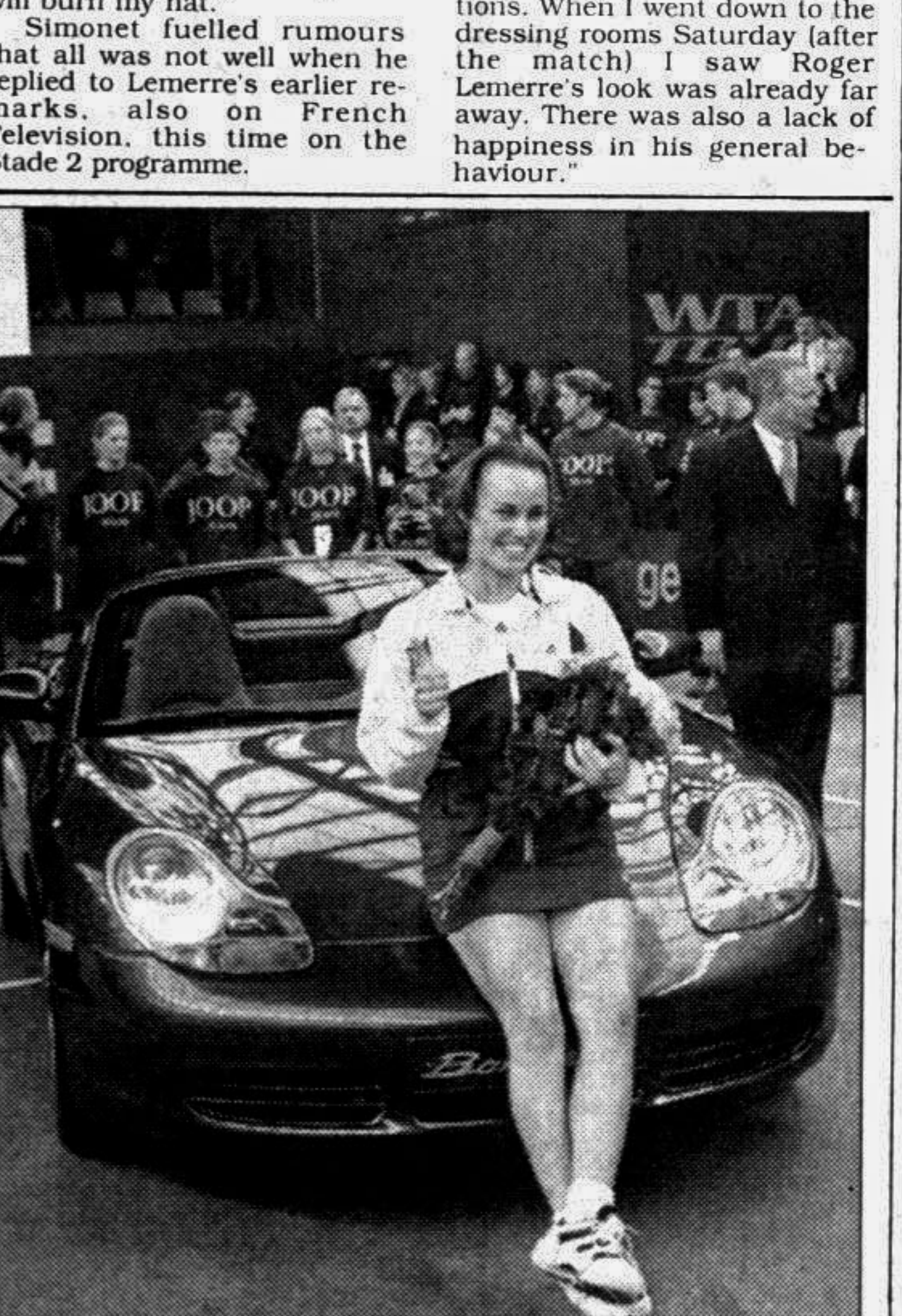
out with a quote that would have done justice to former French international Eric Cantona, who often gave poetic answers to journalists questions during his career at Manchester United.

Lemerre said: "If my hat knows who I am voting for I will burn my hat."

Simonet fuelled rumours that all was not well when he replied to Lemerre's earlier remarks, also on French Television, this time on the Stade 2 programme.

Simonet said wryly: "His hat will have to speak to me and I hope the whole footballing world will find the right response."

But the FFF president admitted all was not well when he said: "I admit that (Lemerre's) language gave me many emotions. When I went down to the dressing rooms Saturday (after the match) I saw Roger Lemerre's look was already far away. There was also a lack of happiness in his general behaviour."



World number one Swiss Martina Hingis standing in front of her new Porsche car she won at the Filderstadt Grand Prix on October 10. She beat Mary Pierce of France in the final. — AFP photo

## Briton charged over Waddle transfer

MARSEILLE, France, Oct 11: A British accountant Lennard Lazarus, condemned in his absence to a year in jail and a 100,000 francs fine in offences relating to the finances of French first division club Marseille, will be retried in March 2000 in the French coastal city, reports AFP.

Lazarus, 53, contests the charges and will appear voluntarily on March 13 in front of Marseille judges after the chamber Monday lifted the arrest warrant issued against Lazarus on August 4.

Lazarus, suspected of misconduct in the transfer of former England international Chris Waddle from Tottenham Hotspur to Marseille, is accused of "false accounting, complicity in the abuse of confidence and abuse of social funds."

Lazarus is one of eight businessmen judged in 1997 in connection with financial malpractice at the French club.

In total 13 people have been convicted by the Aix-en-Provence court of appeal, notably the club's former president Bernard Tapie.

Tapie, who has launched a new career as a stage actor, was given a three-year suspended prison sentence, a 300,000 francs fine and a five-year ban from public life.

## Norman notches Heineken Open

SHANGHAI, Oct 11: Swede Magnus Norman became the most successful player so far in 1999 as he won a season-leading fifth title Monday in a rain-delayed final over Marcelo Rios at the 350,000-dollar Shanghai Heineken Open, reports AFP.

Norman, who will break into the top 20 for the first time in his career, outlasted the top seed from Chile 2-6, 6-3, 7-5, taking two hours, 22 minutes to earn victory.

The 23-year-old takes away 46,000 dollars in prize money, but more importantly, the prestige of having won the most tournaments on the ATP Tour this year.

Norman has been level on four alongside world number one Andre Agassi and the injury-idled Pete Sampras.

But he waited out a Sunday rain delay which allowed the completion of only one game before coming back Monday to win as dry weather prevailed.

"This is great, it's a dream," said the winner. "But it was a really tough win over Marcelo."

Both world number seven Rios and second seed Norman were catching a flight later Monday for Singapore, site of this week's final Asian event of the season on the Tour.

Rios is top seed while Norman is third behind Australian Mark Philippoussis at the indoor tournament.

The rain interruption was the second in as many years for the Shanghai event.

1998's inaugural finale was eventually played on a Monday, with Michael Chang beating Goran Ivanisevic. A day of drizzle Sunday at the Xian Xia Tennis Centre prevented more than one game from being completed.

Rios, holder in Singapore, had been looking for his third title in Asia after winning trophies in Kuala Lumpur in 1995 and Singapore.

## Hingis winner at Filderstadt

FILDERSTADT, Oct 11: Top seed Martina Hingis of Switzerland captured her seventh title of 1999 with victory in the final of the Filderstadt Grand Prix on Sunday, reports AFP.

The 19-year-old world number one needed only 64 minutes to defeat fourth seed Mary Pierce of France 6-4, 6-1 to secure her third title here in four years.

Hingis, who came from a set down in the semifinals against defending champion Sandrine Testud, made a more positive start against Pierce, breaking serve in the third game. The French player levelled at 3-3, only to drop serve again to trail 3-4.

Hingis saved a break point in the following game with a backhand pass, and held on to win the opening set in 36 minutes.

The second set was one-way traffic for Hingis. She took advantage of several Pierce errors to build up a 4-0 lead and completed her victory when the French woman hit a backhand wide.

Afterwards Hingis said her struggle in the semi-finals had set her up nicely for the final. "I was able to read Mary's serve much better than Sandrine's. I was more focused than yesterday and played very solidly."

"I was a little lucky to save a break point at 4-3 in the first set. I didn't want to lose two service games from 40-0, and I think it was the turning point of the match."

Pierce, who has now lost all four finals she has played this year, said she had put up a good performance.

"I played pretty well in the first set. There were a lot of close games and I felt it could have gone either way. Martina played a very solid match and I made a few mistakes in the second set."

The two players were watched by former world number one, Steffi Graf, who attended as a guest of the tournament. The tournament paid tribute to the German star. Graf began her professional career here in 1982 with a 6-4, 6-0 loss to Tracy Austin of the United States.

Hingis joked: "It was strange seeing Steffi watching the match. Every time I looked up, I could see her blonde hair in the stands. She never usually watches anyone at tournaments apart from Andre Agassi."

## Keegan's double delight



SUNDERLAND, England, Oct 11: Kevin Keegan marked their Euro 2000 reprieve by beating Belgium, the co-hosts of next year's finals, 2-1 in a friendly international with superbly taken goals by Alan Shearer and Jamie Redknapp on Sunday, reports Reuters.

But coach Kevin Keegan said afterwards that although he was delighted with the win, he was furious with his side's first half performance and lost his temper with his players at half-time.

"I got very angry with Jamie Redknapp and Frank Lampard in particular for the way they played in the first half," he said. "And although that might sound harsh because Frank was making his debut if you are playing for England, you have to produce."

"To be fair they both improved in the second half as did the whole team, and of course Jamie has got his great goal to remember."

"I changed the system, there were new players in the side, and it wasn't fantastic. But I am delighted to have beaten Belgium."

Sweden's 2-0 win over Poland in their final group five qualifier secured England a place in the Euro 2000 play-offs as Group Five runners-up and gave Keegan "The best weekend I've had since I became England manager."

The draw for the play-offs will be made in Aachen, Germany next Wednesday.

Belgium coach Robert Waseige, whose side qualify automatically for the finals as co-hosts with the Netherlands, saw his team lose for the first time since he took over three

matches ago, but he was not too upset with the performance.

"We had some players missing through injury and I gave some others their chance and I thought we played well enough," he said.

"We did defend badly for the first goal — and really, what could anyone do about the second? We lost, but it was a positive defeat if you can have such a thing."

He tormented the Belgian defence and went close to scoring three times, although he also picked up a yellow card after Swedish referee Anders Frisk judged he dived in the penalty box.

The match, the first England international in Sunderland since 1950 and the first staged at the two-year-old Stadium of Light, was never a classic but was still a useful exercise for both managers as next year's finals come ever closer.

Keegan enjoyed it so much in the end he suggested England should play more international matches in the future.

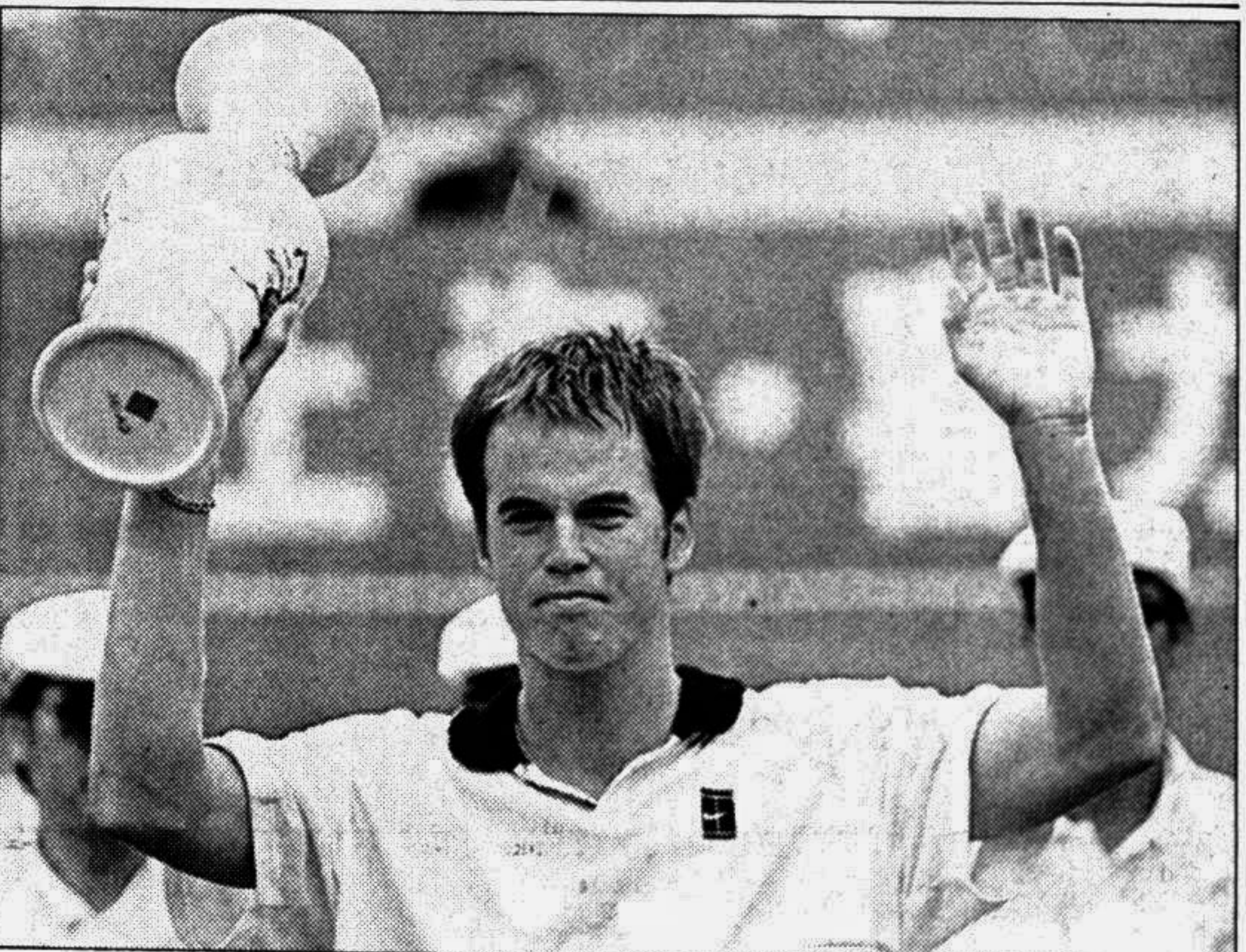
"The crowd were fantastic and even cheered the Newcastle players," he said. "This could become for us what Seville is to Spain."

KEVIN KEEGAN

Shearer, who plays for Sunderland's arch-rivals Newcastle, for once delighted the crowd at the Stadium of Light, with England's first goal after only six minutes — a well-taken overhead kick after Belgium failed to clear a corner.

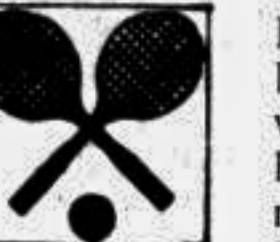
It was his 14th goal for either his club or country in the last four weeks and his 28th for England, moving him up to joint sixth with David Platt in the all-time scoring list.

Redknapp produced the outstanding moment of the match with a stunning 67th minute winner and his first goal for



Swede Magnus Norman shows off the Shanghai Heineken Open trophy after the final against Chilean Marcelo Rios yesterday. — AFP photo

## Kucera stays the course



BASLE, Switzerland, Oct 11: Slovakia's Karol Kucera held on to record a dramatic 6-4, 7-6, 4-6, 4-6, 6-3 victory over defending champion Tim Henman in the final of the Swiss Indoor Championship yesterday, confirming his return to form after a long injury layoff, reports Reuters.

Kucera, who only returned to action two weeks ago in Tashkent after missing nearly two months with a wrist injury, displayed no signs of rust as he battled Henman for four hours taking the title in a tense fifth set tie-break 7-2.

"I was pretty worried and scared after the second set," said Kucera, who has seen his ranking drop from number six to 20 in the last year because of injury. "I didn't feel that well and I was worried, especially since I hadn't played in such a long while."

It was the 25-year-old Slovakian's fifth career title and first this season while the fourth-seeded Henman saw his drought extend into a second year having not won a title since lifting the Swiss championship last year.

Until arriving in Basle, Kucera, who upset world number one Andre Agassi en route to the final, had not won a match since July, having crashed out in the first round in Tashkent.

"He's a very deceptive player because you don't think he's putting any effort into his tennis but he's all over the court," said Henman, the world number eight. "I have no regrets, I couldn't have played better."

Kucera and Henman knew they were in for a long afternoon even before stepping onto the court. Henman holding a slight 5-4 edge in head-to-head career meetings.

Henman, who has now lost in all four finals he has appeared this season, got the defence of his title off to a shaky start as Kucera broke the Briton on his opening serve to take the first set.

After the early break, the match fell into a rhythm with Kucera working primarily from the baseline and Henman attacking the net, neither man

able to carve out an advantage, sending the set to a tie-break that Kucera won 12-10.

Undaunted, Henman finally got the break he had been searching for for almost two hours, taking Kucera's serve to open the third set and jump out to a 2-0 lead.

Signs of fatigue finally began to show as Henman broke Kucera again to easily take the third set.

Henman continued to apply pressure in the fourth, once again recording the early break on his way to levelling the match at two sets apiece.

With Henman again getting the early break in the fifth to top up 2-1 and poised to move in for the kill, Kucera dug deep into his reserves and immediately broke back sending the set to another tie-break, which he won with surprising ease 7-2.

"It was a tough one to lose," said Henman. "I thought I had turned it around but it's difficult against a guy who returns serve as well as him."

"I don't think it's anything I did wrong. I think he just raised his game."

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