

African Champs' League
Battle for places
hots up

JOHANNESBURG, Nov 6: Group 1 of the African Champions' League reaches a thrilling climax on Sunday when Raja Casablanca of Morocco host Al-Ahly of Egypt with a place in the final at stake, reports AFP.

A draw will suffice for 1989 and 1997 champions Raja while 1982 and 1987 winners Al-Ahly must win at the 80,000-capacity Mohamed V Stadium in the Moroccan commercial capital to finish first.

Raja boast a 100 per cent home record in this year, defeating Ndiamour of Senegal 4-0 and Djoliba of Mali 2-1 in qualifying rounds and Hearts of Oak of Ghana 1-0 and Shooting Stars of Nigeria 1-0.

The Green Devils have won 18 home matches, drawn one and lost two, scored 45 goals and conceded six during five appearances in the leading Pan-African club competition.

But it was a surprise 1-0 victory at Al-Ahly during September through a late Mohammed Khoubache goal that put a team coached by Argentinian Luis Oscar Fullone in the driving seat.

Goalkeeper Mustapha Chadi, a survivor from the 1997 cup-winning team, has been a key figure, conceding only one in five pool matches, ironically against lowly Shooting Stars.

Al-Ahly have displayed mixed away form, defeating Young Africans of Tanzania 3-0 and losing 1-0 to Rayon Sport of Rwanda in the knockout stages before beating Shooting Stars 3-2 and falling 2-1 to Hearts of Oak.

The return after a lengthy absence through injury of veteran striker Hossam Hassan will heighten confidence among the Egyptians as he scored six goals in three Champions League matches.

However, the Cairo club are not generally good travellers with only six victories from 35 matches in 11 appearance spanning 23 years and the odds favour Raja qualifying for a probable showdown with Esperance of Tunisia.

Shooting Stars host Hearts of Oak in a match of academic interest only as the Nigerians are doomed to finish bottom of the standings after four losses in five matches.

**Blatter in
Gaza**

GAZA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, Nov 6: FIFA president Sepp Blatter arrived in the Gaza Strip Friday for a two-day visit to the Palestinian territories, officials said, reports AFP.

The chief of the international football governing body is scheduled to hold talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat Friday night in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Today he will lay the corner stone of a Gaza football stadium and centre for the Palestinian Association for Amateur Football, which was founded in 1928.

Blatter will attend a ceremony in East Jerusalem the same day marking the start of the construction of a sports complex for Palestinians.

Then he will travel to Amman and attend an evening football match. The following day Blatter will meet King Abdullah II, who is the former president of the Jordanian Football Federation.

Blatter's delegation, which includes advisor Michel Platini, was originally scheduled to go to Israel during his current regional tour, but his visit was been postponed for a week to enable him to attend a Euro 2000 playoff between Israel and Denmark in Tel Aviv on November 13.

**Lessons for
Cambodian
soccer fans**

PHNOM PENH, Nov 6: Cambodia's football federation is to give local fans special lessons in discipline for Sunday's Asian Cup battle with Hong Kong after fan violence marred a match last weekend against Indonesia, officials said Friday, reports AFP.

There will be special announcements throughout the match to advise our audience and fans to be disciplined and not throw bottles of water at each other like last week," Keo Sareth, Secretary General of the Cambodian Football Federation, said.

The emergency lessons in how to behave follow a formal complaint from the Asian Football Confederation after last Saturday's dramatic match.

During the group seven qualifier against leaders Indonesia -- which saw Cambodia thrashed 5-1 -- police were called in after local fans began to throw bottles of mineral water at Indonesian supporters.

However many of the military police reinforcement rushed in to quell the trouble simply stood by and watched the match.

"We are taking this very seriously, and will take the necessary measures to ensure it does not happen again," Keo Sareth asserted.

"We plan to have the same levels of police, but they too have to be better advised and pay more attention to the crowd. We want our country to have a good reputation," he added.

Indonesia and Hong Kong lead the group but Cambodia's succession of defeats has left them languishing at the bottom of the table with little prospect of qualifying for next year's finals in the Lebanon.

UEFA Cup third round pairings
Galatasaray's new Italian test



GENEVA, Nov 6: Turkish side Galatasaray, who sensationally beat AC Milan 3-2 on Wednesday to leapfrog over them in the Champions League and deprive them of even a consolation UEFA Cup place, were drawn against another Italian side, Bologna, at the UEFA Cup third round draw here on Friday. reports AFP.

The Turks, who garnered only one point from their first four matches but then trounced Hertha Berlin 4-1 away and followed it up with the astonishing success over the five-time European Cup winners, will draw heavily on the inspiration of 34-year-old Gheorghe Hagi and his 32-year-old Romanian counterpart Gica Popescu.

Two other teams Glasgow Rangers and Borussia Dortmund, who benefitted from UEFA's bizarre ruling that the third placed sides from the Champions League could then enter the UEFA Cup, meet in a tie that will give the Scottish champions a chance to avenge their elimination to another German side Bayern Munich.

For Rangers German keeper Stefan Klos it means a return to the club where he won the 1997 European Cup but who he left after a bitter court case when Dortmund challenged his right to a Bosman style transfer.

Holders Parma, who have rebounded after a dreadful start to the season including being knocked out of the Champions League by Rangers in the qualifying round, face Austrian outfit Sturm Graz, who beat Marseille during their group campaign.

Another Italian giant Juventus were handed a tricky tie with Greek side Olympiakos, although the 1996 European Cup winners have the consolation of hosting the second leg.

Two of the English clubs fared well in the draw with current Premiership leaders Leeds United, unbeaten in 12 matches including 11 wins, facing another Moscow club, Spartak, after knocking out Lokomotiv Moscow 7-1 on aggregate in the second round.

For manager David O'Leary, who has transformed the club from the dour defensive style of previous coach George Graham into one of the most attractive young sides in Europe, it represents a chance to beat one of the third placed Champions League teams, whose entry into the competition he described as "farical".

"We're very happy to be going back to Moscow. The facilities were superb and we know what to expect," Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale said.

"They're a very, very good

side but at this stage of the competition, and when you're unused as we were, you know you'll get a tough game."

"But the way we're playing at the moment, we shouldn't fear anyone," he added.

Meanwhile, Arsenal, who failed to go through from a Champions League group that comprised Barcelona and Fiorentina, face on paper an easy task against French Cup holders Nantes, who are currently second from bottom in the league.

"We've never played Nantes before in a European competition but I think our team is half-French!" said Gunners vice-chairman David Dein.

"We've got Arsene Wenger, Emmanuel Petit, Patrick Vieira, Gilles Grimandi and Thierry Henry, and I guess they'll know all about Nantes."

Dein, meanwhile, confirmed Arsenal would play their home games in the competition at Highbury instead of Wembley.

The ties will be played on November 25 with the second legs on December 9.

Draw for the UEFA Cup third round:

Parma v Sturm Graz
Lyon v Bremen
Panathinaikos v Deportivo Bologna v Galatasaray
Udinese v Bayer Leverkusen
Lens v Kaiserslautern
Spartak v Leeds

PARIS, Nov 6: Injury to Chilean world number eight Marcelo Rios means Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten becomes the third man to qualify for the season-ending ATP Tour World Championship in Hanover starting on November 23, reports AFP.

Rios pulled out overnight Thursday with a groin problem, guaranteeing Kuerten a spot and making him the first Brazilian to make the field in the 30-year history of the event.

US world number one Andre Agassi and second-ranked Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov were already assured of their berths at the lucrative eight-man event.

Rios, announcing that his year is over, said: "I regret that I won't be able to play Hanover because it is such a great event. It's a shame because it's the second year in a row that I have an injury and can't play there but I need to rest and recover."

He missed the showdown 12 months ago with back problems.

Rios' withdrawal means that Nicolas Lapentti of Ecuador, currently lying ninth in the race, is set to move up and claim a late slot.

Theoretically the door has also reopened a tiny crack for Britain's Tim Henman, who is currently 12th on the list but who can gain enough points to nudge in should he do well next week in Stockholm, his last chance saloon.

Henman's hopes had looked to have disintegrated Thursday when he crashed out of the Paris Open to Mar Philippoussis in the third round.

Kuerten to fill Rios' spot

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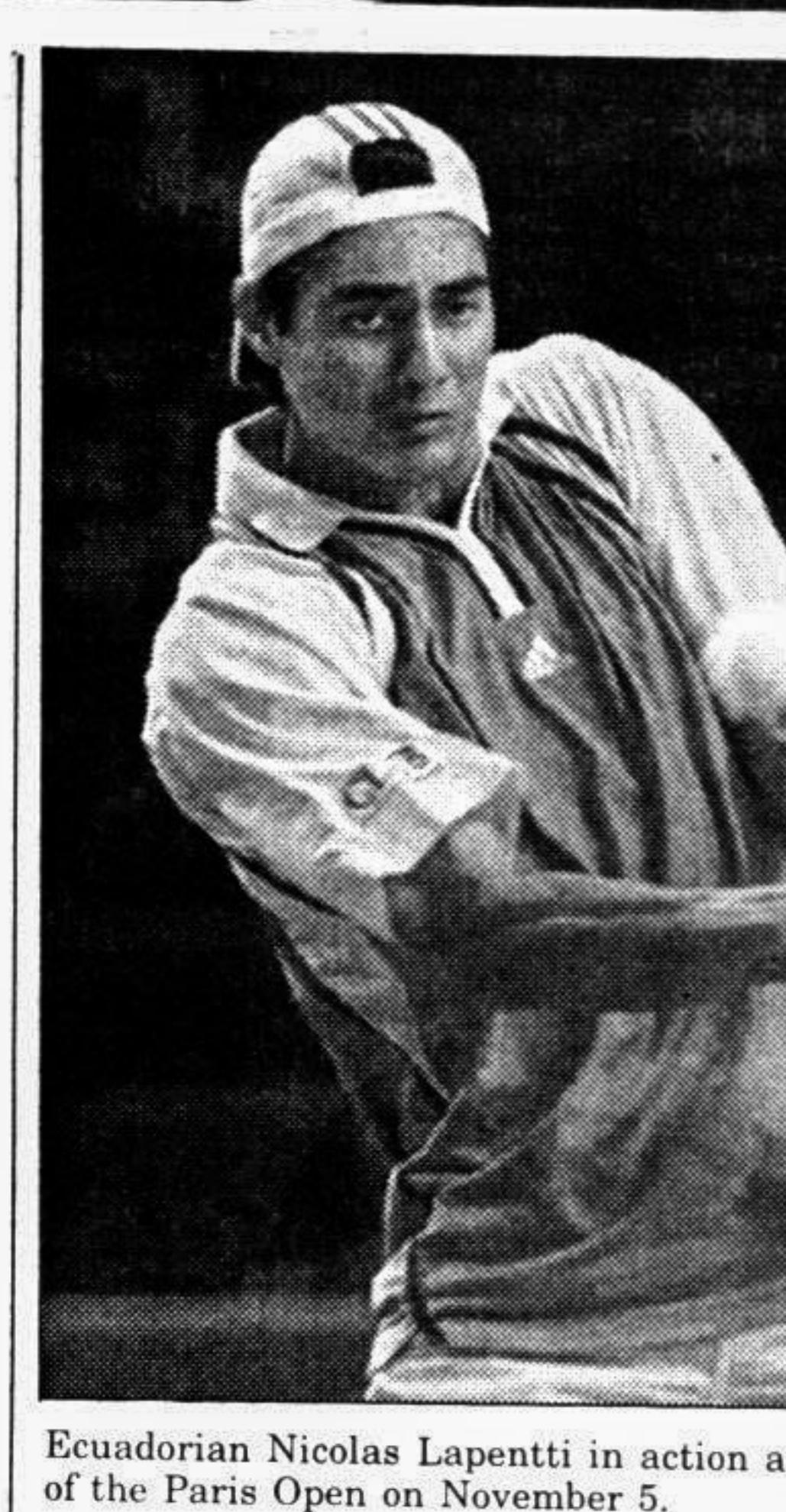
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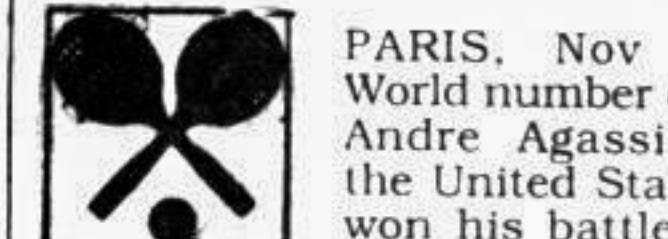
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Ecuadorian Nicolas Lapentti in action against Germany's Tommy Haas in the quarterfinals of the Paris Open on November 5. — AFP photo

Agassi, Chang cruise



PARIS, Nov 6: World number one Andre Agassi of the United States won his battle of wits with big-serving Australian Mark Philippoussis hands down at the 2.5-million-dollar Paris Open on Friday to storm into the semifinals, reports AFP.

Agassi, a title-winner here five years ago before his form slumped and left him 141st in the world, was never challenged by the man nicknamed "Scud" as he tore through their quarterfinal 6-4, 6-1 in just 65min even winning the ace count 9-8 as Philippoussis let himself down with seven double faults.

Two crucially allowed Agassi to get 5-4 ahead in the opening set.

Agassi now plays Ecuador's 11th seed Nicolas Lapentti, who ousted German 13th seed Tommy Haas 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 in his other semifinals.

Lapentti's win puts him in line for a place in the season-ending ATP Tour World Championship in Hanover later this month and also guarantees a place for world number three Pete Sampras, who joins Agassi, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Gustavo Kuerten as confirmed entrants.

Agassi said his form was very satisfying as he chases a second triumph in Paris in five

months after his French Open title.

"Today I won some crucial service points. It was a good day for me today," said Agassi, who looked forward to doing