

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 the this year, defeating Ndiambour 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 Chadili, 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 appearances 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 cornerstone 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 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 chance to avenge their elimination from the Champions' League by 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 unseeded 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.

did not seem the case at all," he said.

Robert Budzinsky, general manager of Nantes, said that it was time for his team to stand up and be counted.

"It's time for us to find our fluency like we achieved last season," he said.

"If we qualify it will be more than just a great success it will be a miracle," he added.

However, Newcastle United, who have staged a mini-revival under former England and Barcelona boss Bobby Robson, face a tough task having been drawn against Serie A side AS Roma.

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



UEFA vice-president Senes Erzik (L) and official Viacheslav Kolosak during the UEFA Cup third round's draw in Geneva on November 5.

which they used for the Champions League.

Nantes captain Mickael Landreau said that he was delighted at last to have drawn an opponent worthy of European competition.

"People say that age has finally caught up with their defence but from what I saw of them away from home against Barcelona and Fiorentina that

Ajax v Mallorca
Rangers v Dortmund
Roma v Newcastle
AEK Athens v Monaco
Celta Vigo v Benfica
Olympiakos v Juventus
Wolfsburg v Atletico Madrid
Arsenal v Nantes
Slavia Prague v Steaua
Bucarest

First-leg November 25, second-leg December 9.

Kuerten to fill Rios' spot

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-month 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.

Paradon in final

YOKOHAMA, Japan, Nov 6: Bangkok Asian Games doubles champion Paradon Srichaphan of Thailand defeated third seed Noam Okun on Saturday to reach the final of the ATP Challenger Yokohama tennis tournament, reports AFP.

The top-seeded Thai number one player, semifinalist in the Singapore Open last month, scored a 6-4, 7-6 victory over the Israeli in the 25,000-dollar event in the western outskirts of Tokyo.

In the final Sunday, Srichaphan will take on unseeded Lee Hyung-Taik of South Korea, who defeated U Heuberger of Switzerland 6-2, 6-3 in the other semifinals.

Advanta tennis draw held

PHILADELPHIA, Nov 6 (AP): Alexandra Stevenson gets another chance to prove that Wimbledon was no fluke.

A potential second-round rematch of Wimbledon semifinalists Lindsay Davenport and Stevenson highlighted Friday's draw for the WTA Tour's Advanta Championships.

The 28-woman field boasts six of the top ranked players -- including the top three, Martina Hingis, Davenport and Venus Williams -- to compete for the 80,000 dollar first prize beginning Monday at the Pavilion at Villanova University. Players also will be positioning for the Chase Championships, November 15-21 at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Hingis, Davenport, Venus Williams, and No. 4 seed Nathalie Tauziat of France were all given byes into the second round.

There Hingis, who's already clinched the year-end No. 1 ranking, faces the winner of the match between Anna Smashova of Israel and American Chanda Rubin. Williams, a semifinalist loser at the US Open to Hingis, will play either Patty Schnyder of Switzerland or Cara Black of Zimbabwe.

At Wimbledon, Stevenson came from nowhere, advancing from the qualifying tournament to the semifinals before Davenport, who went on to win Wimbledon, ended her run in straight sets. Subsequently, Stevenson did not win another WTA Tour match after her Wimbledon loss until this week in Quebec, dropping her to No. 53 in the current rankings.

Other seeded players include No. 5 Anna Kournikova of Russia, who will face Justice Henin of Belgium; No. 6 Amanda Coetzer, who goes against Lisa Raymond; No. 7 Dominique Van Roost of Belgium, who plays Elena Likovtseva of Russia; and No. 8 Julie Halard-Decugis of France, who meets former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez of Spain.

Rwanda turn to Gutendorf

COLOGNE, Nov 6: German football veteran Rudi Gutendorf has been appointed head coach of Rwanda's national side and will try to steer them to the next World Cup finals in 2002, reports AFP.

The 73-year-old Gutendorf is one of this country's most experienced trainers and counts Bundesliga clubs VfB Stuttgart, Hamburg and Hertha Berlin among his 53 previous jobs.

"My love and joy for football remains unbroken. I hope this isn't my last job as coach," the tireless Gutendorf said Friday as he began a six week training course with his Rwandan charges in the west German town of Bitburg.

His greatest success came in 1963 when he coached Meidericher SV (now Duisburg) to Germany's first ever Bundesliga title using a system of rock solid defence.

Gutendorf's 38-year-old Australian wife Marikka and nine year old son Fabian are expected to stay in Sydney while he carries out his duties in Rwanda. Other developing countries whose football teams have had the Gutendorf touch over the years include Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Nepal and Fiji.



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

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 quarterfinal faceoff.

Lapentti's win puts him in line for a place at 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 battle with Australian Open semifinalist Lapentti, winner of two Tour titles this year -- including in Lyon two weeks ago.

Philippoussis had joked earlier that the progress in his game over the past two years was down to cutting his hair -- but here he was more Delilah than Samson.

Agassi on the other hand has gone from strength to strength since cutting his tresses.

It was a good day at the office for another American as qualifier Michael Chang ousted French 15th seed Cedric Pioline to book a semifinal with Russian teen Marat Safin, who stopped another American, Jim Courier, in his tracks, winning 6-2, 6-4.

Lone French survivor Pioline looked to have the match all sewn up after moving 3-1 ahead in the deciding having already had a match point at 6-5 in the second set tiebreak as the two duelled for two hours to split the opening two sets.

But former world number two Chang, who won his only Grand Slam on the other side of Paris at Roland Garros ten years ago, gathered his resources and won the marathon

5-7, 7-6, 6-4 in 2hr 58min on his third match point.

Chang, 27, seemed to find hidden reserves of energy as a leaping forehand handed him the initiative to go 5-4 ahead in the final set after an early break in his deciding against Pioline, who had been 3-1 up and heading for the last four.

"This week has been an incredible week for me. It's tough to explain. I'm just trying to come here and play the best I can."

"I feel very blessed to be able to come out and play in the semifinals," said a delighted Chang.

Asked if he was looking to go down in history as the first qualifier to win the tournament, now in its 14th year, Chang said: "It's not so much about going out and breaking records. God gives you a talent and you go out and try to make the most of it."

Chang missed a set point in the 12th game but moved 4-1 clear in the tiebreak only for Pioline to force his way back into contention with four points on a roll, the last a tremendous whipped return.

But the Frenchman missed his chance at match point with a return which dropped well wide and former world number two Chang, now 72nd on the Tour computer, wrapped up the set to level with a crosscourt effort which whizzed like lightning past his opponent.

History -- if not the crowd -- was on Chang's side given that he went into the encounter with a 6-1 advantage in their head-to-head battle going back seven years, the exception being an indoor clash at Stuttgart two years ago.

Yet he only made the main draw after saving a match point in the qualifiers against Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic.

World number 34 Safin, reached the last four on his debut here as he won his first ever Super 9 quarterfinal against 39th-ranked former world number one Courier, who had beaten the Spanish-based Russian on their only previous meeting in a Davis Cup five-setter in the United States last year.

This time Courier wilted in just 57min.

Pierce on course

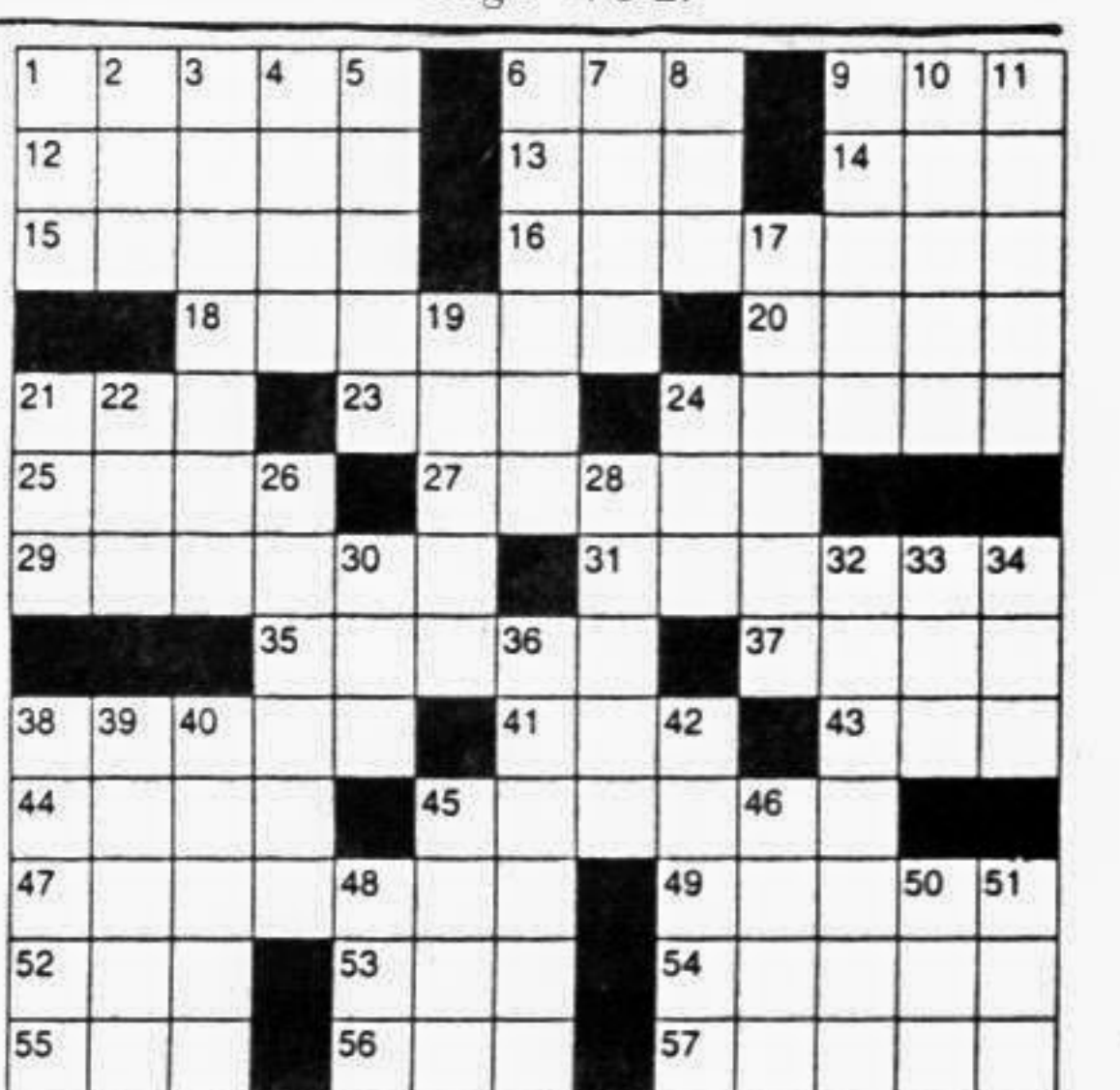
LEIPZIG, Nov 6: Top-seeded Mary Pierce of France, seeking her second consecutive title on the WTA Tour, defeated former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez of Spain 6-2, 6-2 on Friday to reach the semifinals of the Sparkassen Cup.

Pierce will be looking to reach her fifth final of the year when she plays qualifier Kvetia Hrdlickova in the semifinals Saturday.

By winning the Austrian Open last week, the sixth-ranked Pierce ended a 12th-month drought without a title. She crushed Martinez with her powerful ground strokes, winning 6-2, 6-2.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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26 Turner Field team
28 Tend a stubborn shoelace
30 Leading lady
32 Roll call
33 Spotted
34 Cyclopean
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40 Admits customers
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45 Lima's land
46 Unadulterated
48 Cap
50 Narcs' org.
51 Ukraine, formerly (Abbr.)



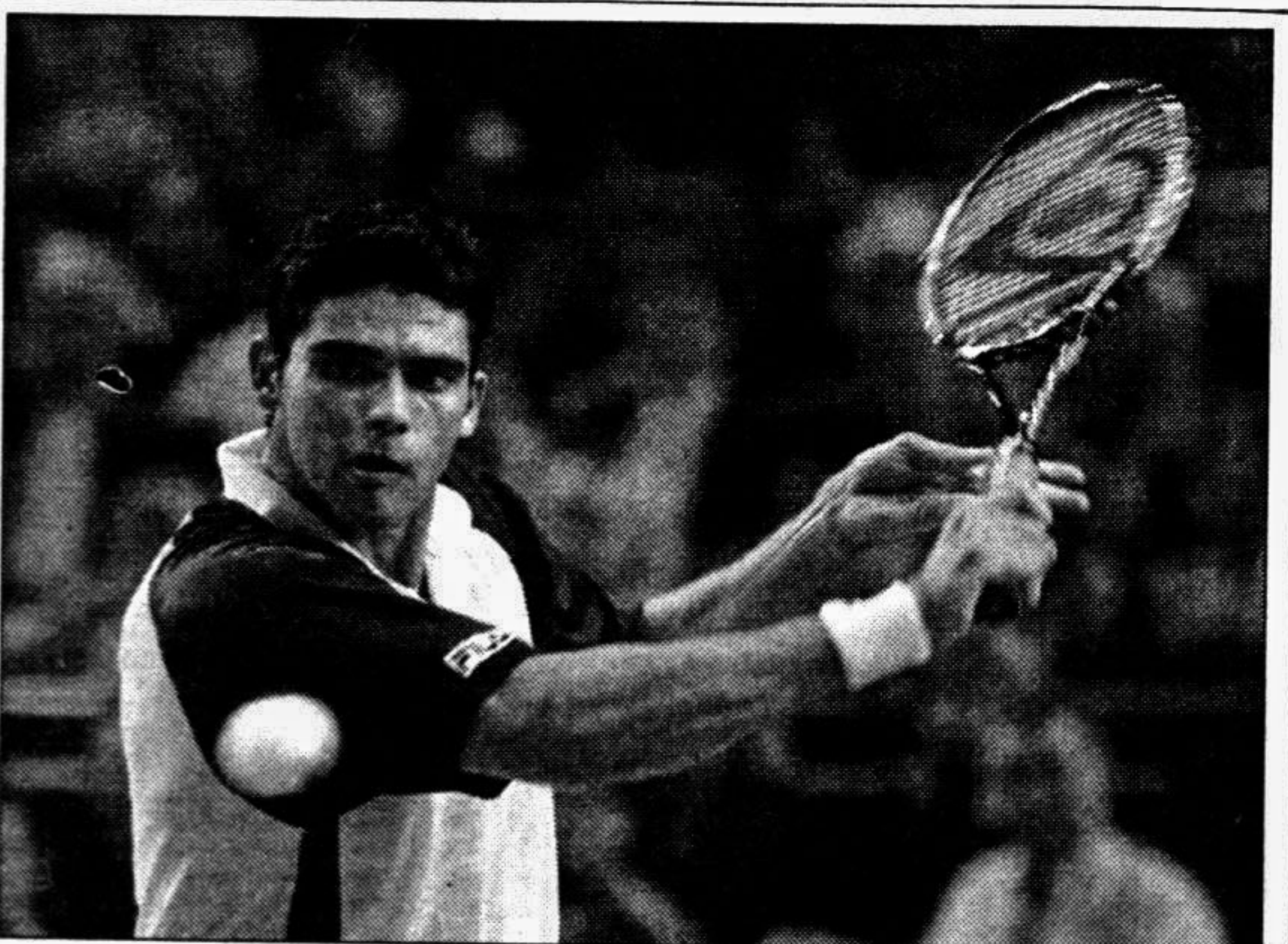
CRYPTOQUIP

P U D C G P D G N U D T W G C
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Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals W

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.



Australian Mark Philippoussis is about to make a backhand return against American Andre Agassi at the Paris Open on November 5.

— AFP photo