

### Kaiser hopeful of Oceania's support

AUCKLAND, Nov 26: The chief of the Oceania Football Confederation has reviewed his support for England's 2006 World Cup bid, according to German legend Franz Beckenbauer, reports AFP.

Beckenbauer -- here to drum up support for Germany's 2006 bid during the FIFA under-17 world championships -- said OFC boss Charlie Dempsey would not necessarily back England.

But Beckenbauer said England had "home advantage" in trying to press their case with Dempsey and other Oceania officials.

"Today Charlie Dempsey said he had changed his mind. He is 50-50 now," Beckenbauer said when asked about reports Dempsey had already thrown his backing behind the English.

English legend Sir Bobby Charlton also met Dempsey Friday along with South Africa's Danny Jordaan.

En route to Tokyo for the preliminary rounds draw of the 2002 World Cup next week, with another German great, Jürgen Klinsmann, Beckenbauer, said: "Winning the right to host the 2006 World Cup is seen as an important step in the reunification of Germany."

"I won everything I could in football but this (the bid) is a real challenge."

Beckenbauer acknowledged South Africa's claims to host the finals.

"They (Africa) are the only major confederation yet to host the championship."

He would not be drawn on a likely bid for 2010 if Germany missed out at the vote in July next year.

### Sofia to stage Spartak-Leeds UEFA tie

SOFIA, Nov 26: The UEFA Cup match between Spartak Moscow and English Premiership side Leeds United will now be staged on December 2 in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia, reports AFP.

The rearranged tie will be played at Levski Sofia's Georgi Assparouhov Stadium, which has a 26,000 capacity.

Earlier Thursday the match, due to be played in Moscow was postponed following a decision by a senior UEFA delegate and Swedish match official Anders Frisk.

Moscow Dynamo stadium director Oleg Tolochelovitch said that sub-zero temperatures -- which reached minus 20 Celsius overnight -- had frozen the pitch and stadium staff had failed in their attempts to thaw the playing surface.

The senior UEFA match official had earlier Thursday decided to move the match to another Moscow stadium -- Luzhnik - but later reversed the decision after it became apparent that the pitch there was also unplayable.

### Strasbourg player apologises

STRASBOURG, Nov 26: Strasbourg skipper Teddy Bertin Thursday apologised for calling a group of his club's fans "Boschs" - a derogatory term for a German - at a training session, reports AFP.

Around 20 retired supporters of the Alsatian French first division club were watching a training session Wednesday when the incident happened.

When youth team player Régis Dorn - the only player in the squad born in Alsace - scored twice the fans shouted: "Well done the Alsatian."

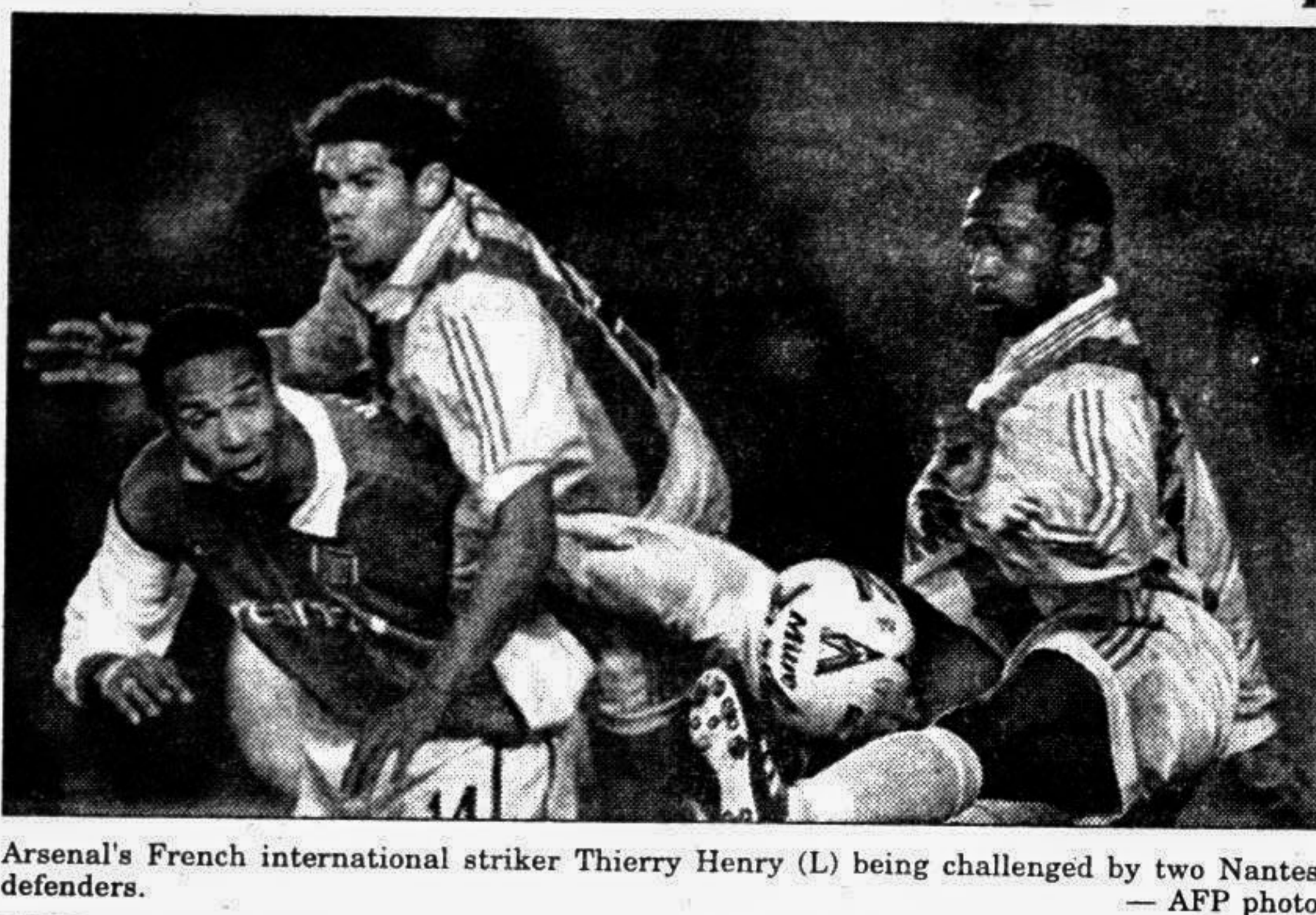
Clearly angry, club captain Bertin retorted at the elderly fans: "Shut your mouths and go home you dirty Boschs."

Bosch, which is a derogatory term for a German, is considered very insulting in Alsace which frequently has been annexed by Germany in its history and was only returned to French sovereignty in 1945 at the end of the Second World War.

On Thursday Bertin with his club manager Claude Leroy present as an arbitrator apologised for his outburst, saying: "I regret and am sorry for what happened yesterday. What I said in a moment of anger was thoughtless. It was particularly stupid of me as in my family there is a branch with German blood in their veins."

### India to bid to host 2006 Asian Games

NEW DELHI, Nov 26: India has thrown down a challenge to Hong Kong and Malaysia by announcing it will bid to host the 2006 Asian Games in Bombay, reports AFP.



Arsenal's French international striker Thierry Henry (L) being challenged by two Nantes defenders. — AFP photo

## Top guns face to face

MILAN, Nov 26: Italy is bracing for a clash of the titans this weekend when joint Serie A leaders Lazio and Juventus do battle at the Olympic stadium, reports AFP.

The two sides have both rattled up 21 points after losing just one of their 10 games so far. Now they meet in Rome on Sunday night for a match which is worth far more than three points in the league table.

Victory for Lazio would do much for the confidence that was shattered by last weekend's humiliating 4-1 derby drubbing by AS Roma, and then partially re-built by their 2-0 midweek win over Marseille.

Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti said bravely: "I think the criticism did us good... we knew that we'd got the derby all wrong."

"But we put it all behind us. We did well (against Marseille) and now we'll try to do the same against Juventus."

Lazio, unbeaten in all competition this season before last weekend's defeat, will be looking to Chilean Marcelo "The Matador" Salas to supply the goals, supported by either Croatian Alen Boksic or Simone Inzaghi.

But the psychological stakes are high too for Juventus.

The Turin club, already on a roll after beating reigning champions AC Milan 3-1 last Sunday night, will be unstop-

pable if they can top that by beating a side rated as one of the best in the world.

Team morale got an added boost from trouncing Olympiakos 3-1 in the UEFA Cup third round in midweek and team coach Carlo Ancelotti will be counting on a continuing return to form of his strike trio of Alessandro Del Piero,

Filippo Inzaghi and World Cup winner Zinedine Zidane.

AC Milan face an awesome task in trying to interrupt Parma's month-long winning run, a task made even more difficult after their bruising defeat to Juventus last weekend.

The only good news is that Ukrainian Andriy Shevchenko, the Serie A's top scorer with seven goals, should start after missing the game in Turin.

Neighbours Inter Milan, who gave Lecce six of the best he last weekend, now travel south to face newly-promoted Reggina. Inter will be without Ronaldo, but hopes are high that the world's most expensive footballer ever, 50-million-dollar Christian Vieri, will return from a foot injury.

Roma, just two points behind the league leaders, flushed from the derby and comforted by a narrow 1-0 home win over Newcastle, are away to Udinese.

Giovanni Trapattoni's Fiorentina, midweek conquerors of Manchester United in the European Champions League, travel to Bologna on Saturday.

**Serie A fixtures (1400 GMT unless stated)**  
Saturday: Piacenza v Verona, Bologna v Fiorentina (1930 GMT)  
Sunday: Cagliari v Bari, Lecce v Venezia, AC Milan v Parma, Reggina v Inter Milan, Torino v Perugia, Udinese v AS Roma, Lazio v Juventus (1930 GMT)

### The price for spitting

ROME, Nov 26: AS Roma's Brazilian defender Antonio Zago has been banned for three games after he spat at Lazio's Diego Simeone during Sunday's Rome derby, reports Reuters.

The incident, not seen by the referee, was caught by television cameras. Zago became the fourth player this season to be suspended with the use of video evidence.

Zago said he had been provoked by Argentine midfielder Simeone but the head of Italy's court of sport, Maurizio Laudi, said that while there was evidence of verbal abuse from Simeone it was no excuse for spitting.

"Spitting is an act of violence, a form of aggression which is damaging on a psychological and moral level and which humiliates the opponent," said Laudi.

Zago will miss Roma's away games at Udinese and Bologna and a home fixture with Lecce.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

### Israeli booters let off the hook

TEL AVIV, Nov 26: The Israeli Football Federation has Thursday cleared players in the national team of allegations that they spent the eve of their European Championship play-off decider with Denmark in the company of call girls, reports AFP.

"There is no proof that allows for such an application to be laid," said federation president Gabry Levy in a press conference here Thursday.

"The interim inquiry could not establish until now that the accusation was well founded and for us the affair is closed," he continued.

Levy said that two private detective firms charged with investigating the matter had rejected testimonies of call girls implicating the players. The investigators said that the girls had been in different rooms to those occupied by the Israeli team.

Israeli Minister of Sports and Culture Matan Vilnai, however, cast doubt on the findings of the federation, implying they were covering up on behalf of the players.

"I am all the more surprised at the conclusions of the federation since none of the players accepted to submit themselves to a lie detector test," Vilnai told national radio.

Revelations of the alleged nocturnal activities of the footballers caused a huge outcry. Israel lost the first leg 5-0 to Denmark and were beaten in the return in Copenhagen 3-0, therefore being eliminated from Euro 2000.

### Keane keen to stay with MU

MANCHESTER, England, Nov 26: Roy Keane hinted on Thursday he would sign a new long-term contract with European champions Manchester United despite being free to accept offers from abroad next northern summer, reports Reuters.

United skipper Keane told Greater Manchester Radio: "There's a meeting scheduled next week between the club and my solicitor, so hopefully I will have some positive news then."

"The talks are still at a delicate stage but, fingers crossed, I will have something positive to say."

Italian Serie A sides Lazio and Juventus as well as Spain's Real Madrid were all rumoured to be interested in signing the Ireland midfielder whose current deal runs out in June.

Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

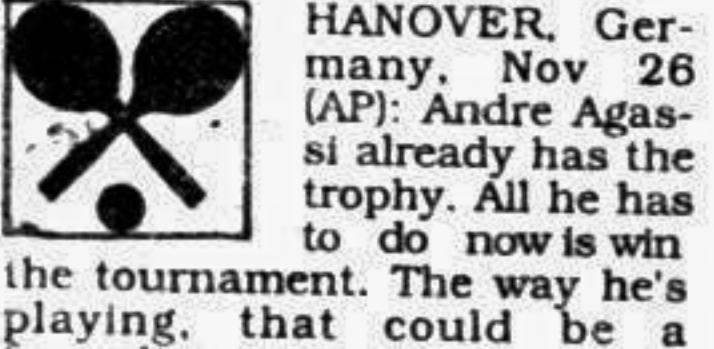
Keane made a statement earlier this season claiming he would wait until next summer before deciding on his future.

However, after pressure from United to begin negotiations on a new contract, Keane now seems ready to re-sign for the Old Trafford team.

United are desperate to keep Keane and if a deal is not reached he could walk away from Old Trafford next summer without the club receiving a fee.

At their annual meeting last week, United chairman Sir Roland Smith claimed the club would do everything in its power to hold on to their captain.

## Agassi just too good



HANOVER, Germany, Nov 26 (AP): Andre Agassi already has his trophy. All he has to do now is win the tournament. The way he's playing, that could be a formality.

After beating Gustavo Kuerten 6-4, 7-5 in his last round-robin match Thursday at the ATP World Tour Finals, Agassi received the ATP trophy presented to the player who finishes the year as No 1 in the world.

"It symbolises a lot for me professionally and personally," Agassi said after receiving the glass trophy which depicts an athlete holding up his index finger in a No 1 sign.

"It's a big accomplishment for me."

Even in the unlikely case that Agassi falters and fails to win the season-ending event, he is assured of finishing the year as No 1.

The American has not dropped a set in sweeping his first three matches and became the first player to advance to the semifinals.

The 3.6-million dollar tournament brings together the top eight players in the world, who are split into two groups. The top two from each pool advance to the last four.

Agassi is sure of winning his Red Group. Kuerten, a Brazilian ranked No 3 in the world, is 1-2, and theoretically still in the running.

The group will be decided Friday, when Pete Sampras, 1-1, plays Nicolas Pietrangeli of Ecuador, who is 0-2. Under the complicated tie-breaking formula, Sampras needs to win just a set to advance.

The White Group also will be decided Friday, when Thomas Enqvist (1-1) plays Todd Martin (0-2) and Nicolas Kiefer (1-1) battles Yevgeny Kafelnikov (2-0).

Kuerten was the first man to break Agassi's serve in the tournament and fired 13 aces. But even that wasn't enough to match Agassi's powerful and precise ground shots.

Despite his impressive performances, Agassi said he did not feel unbeatable.

"It's the exact opposite. That's what keep firing me, the respect for other players."

"It's easy to have an off day and that's all it takes. There's some good tennis out there," he said.

With all due respect, however, Agassi said he didn't really care whom he faced in the semifinals.

"It doesn't really matter at this point. They all present problems," he said.

Agassi is enjoying the best year of his career. He captured the No 1 ranking after winning the French Open and added the US Open title. He also ended Sampras' run of six straight year-end No 1 rankings.

If he wins the ATP championship, Agassi will repeat his triumph from 1990, the year the event came to Germany. After this year's edition, the championship will be staged in Lisbon, Portugal and then move to Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Second-ranked Kafelnikov, who overcame 18 aces by No 4 Enqvist, won 7-5, 3-6, 6-4. Kafelnikov also beat Enqvist in the final of this year's Australian Open.

Kiefer, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

Enqvist, the sixth-ranked German, delighted the home crowd by defeating Martin 6-3, 6-2. Martin, the US Open finalist who is No 7 in the world, will be looking for a face-saving victory Friday against Enqvist.

### No blood-test at 20th London Marathon

LONDON, Nov 26: Blood testing will not be introduced in time for next year's 20th anniversary London Marathon, reports AFP.

Reports had suggested that blood tests, which are more accurate than existing anti-doping measures, would be mandatory for entrants in the April race.

However organisers confirmed on Tuesday there were no plans to introduce blood testing until the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) have ratified such procedures.

"The London Marathon supports moves by the Association of International Marathons for the introduction of blood-testing," said race director David Bedford.

"However, we cannot suddenly do this unilaterally. To my knowledge there is no test in place that we could possibly use for next year's race."

"Once a test is in place, which has been ratified by the IAAF and adopted by other big city marathons, then it will be in place in London."

Blood testing will detect erythropoietin (EPO), a drug used to boost the count of oxygen-carrying red blood cells which can dramatically improve an athlete's stamina.

Meanwhile world record holder Khalid Khannouchi has promised to set an electric pace at next year's Marathon.

The Moroccan smashed Brazilian Ronaldo da Costa's world best in Chicago last month, becoming the first runner to ever dip below two hours and six minutes over the 26.2-mile distance.

He arrived in the capital this week for a whistle-stop visit to check out the course in preparation for next April's race.

"Having travelled round the course by car I'm very confident it will be a fast and interesting race," he said.

"It is always difficult to predict the outcome of a race and much depends on the weather conditions and quality of the pace-makers. However, I think fast times are a real possibility."

Joining Khannouchi in one of the strongest-ever marathon fields is South Africa's Gert Thys, who last year became the first man ever to run three marathons sub-two hours eight minutes.

### Razvan sets new snatch record

ATHENS, Nov 26: Romania's Ilie Razvan broke the world record for snatch in the men's 77 kg category at the World Weightlifting Championships on Thursday, reports Reuters.

He lifted 170 kg to better Armenia's Khachatour Kyapaktsyan's 168.5 kg, lifted on April 16, 1999 in La Coruna, Spain.

### FIFA world under-17 championship final Coaches exuding confidence

AUCKLAND, Nov 26: Brazil coach Carlos Cesar gauded his Australian opponents in Saturday's world under-17 final by declaring his team have already played their toughest game, reports AFP.

Cesar predicted his team would play better than they have done so far this tournament.

"I believe my players can win tomorrow because, I think, we've already played our toughest game in the tournament against Ghana."

"Technically and tactically we were a better team than Ghana, but I didn't know if we could handle their physical approach. As it turned out it wasn't a problem for us," Cesar said.

Australian coach Les Scheinflug retorted in equally blunt terms.

"If the Brazilians think they've played their toughest game in the tournament then that is good, just as long as they believe it," he said.

"We're not frightened of Brazil, we've played them before and the players came off the field after the 2-1 loss in Christchurch (against Brazil) feeling they had let themselves down."

"But they know now that they have an opportunity to snatch glory by beating the best in the business."

"We've got a few surprises for them, courtesy of Australia and Oceania, the spirit here down-under is stronger than anything they can produce."

Meanwhile Ghana will go into Saturday's third and fourth playoffs against the United States without Lawrence Kainya who was suspended for two matches after being sent off against Uruguay in the quarter-final.

Michael Essien, who received two yellow cards in the playoff rounds, will also miss the game as will US defender Seth Trembley, who was sent off in the semifinal against Australia.