English League Cup

### Villa send Hammers packing

LONDON, Jan 12: West Ham's dreams of League Cup glory were shattered by two extra-time goals and a missed penalty amid scenes of high drama at Upton Park on Tuesday night as Aston Villa won their quarterfinal replay 3-1 after extra-

time, reports AFP. Pint-sized striker Julian Joachim pounced with a 95thminute header to put Villa 2-1 up before goalkeeper David James saved a 101st-minute penalty from Paolo Di Canio with a smart dive low to his right - after the Villa goalkeeper had himself brought down the lively Italian striker.

Villa finished off the contest with two minutes remaining when Ian Taylor scored a fine solo goal on the break - his second of the match - as West Ham pushed everyone into attack.

West Ham had gone ahead in normal time with a sweetlytaken goal from Frank Lampard after 47 minutes but Tayfor sent the tie into extra-time with a superb volley 10 minutes from the end.

have been robbed of their chance to take on either Fulham or Leicester in the semi-finals for a place at Wembley.

They won this match on penalties last month but the Football League ordered the match to be replayed because the London club had fielded an ineligible player in striker Manny Omoyimni.

#### FA Cup Gillinghan oust Bradford

LONDON, Jan 12: Second Division Gillingham completed their second giant-killing act in four days when they sent English Premiership side Bradford City tumbling out of the FA Cup on Tuesday night, reports

Gillingham, who beat First Division Walsall in the third round on Saturday, scored a 3-1 victory over the Bantams to carn a fifth-round home clash with either Wolves or another Premiership side. Sheffield Wednesday.

It was a richly-deserved win for Gillingham, who were coasting after goals from Andy Thomson (39) and Barry Ashby (54) put them in the driving

Welsh international Dean Saunders, who won the FA Cup with Liverpool, gave Bradford brief hope with a 77th-minute strike but just a minute later John Hodge restored the twogoal cushion for Gillingham with a low right-footed shot.

It is only the second time in their history that Gillingham have made the fifth-round but the side coached by former Crystal Palace and England winger Peter Taylor outplayed their Premiership opponents.

As hard as the Premiership side's front players tried to unsettle the Gillingham defence, they stood firm and the final whistle sent them through to a lucrative home tie against the winners of next Tuesday's fourth round replay at Molineux.

"It's a tremendous night for me, the players and the club and I am very proud of them," said former England Under-21 boss Taylor.

"We weathered Bradford's early pressure and Andy Thonison's goal came at the right time.

"I never thought the tie was won when we were 2-0 up, but John Hodge's goal certainly put us within sight of the victory. That is the best game John has played for me this season."

Disappointed Bradford manager Paul Jewell said the result was a fair one.

"When you don't compete you can only hold your hands up and say Well done Gillingham'," said Jewell.

## Maradona recovering

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 12: The doctor treating former Argentine star Diego Maradona said Tuesday that the retired footballer's state of health was improving noticeably as he underwent treatment following last week's drugs scare, reports

Dr Ramon Leiguarda, director of the Fleni clinic treating Maradona in Buenos Aires, told a press conference that the controversial 1986 World Cup winner "has had a good rest and has been able to spend much of the day up and about in the hospi-

"He is lucid and has been talking at length with his wife Claudia Villafane," Leiguarda said, adding the 39-year-old's

cardiac readings were no longer giving cause for concern. The doctor revealed cardiologist Carlos Alvarez would put Maradona through a new series of tests Thursday and Friday at the Sacred Heart clinic in Buenos Aires. He also said that

Maradona "is aware of what has happened and accepts the need to follow a definitive course of treatment" aimed at weening him off his cocaine habit.

Dr Leiguarda confirmed earlier reports that Maradona had not suffered any neurological

Maradona's personal surgeon Alfredo Cahe told reporters outside the Fleni clinic that Maradona's recovery would be progressive and his treatment was designed to prevent him from "falling back into mistaken ways".

# Iranians being diplomatic



soil, reports AFP. The Iranians kick off Sunday against the Americans in the Rose Bowl, site of the 1994 World Cup final, following a Wednesday match against Ecuador in the Los Angeles Col-

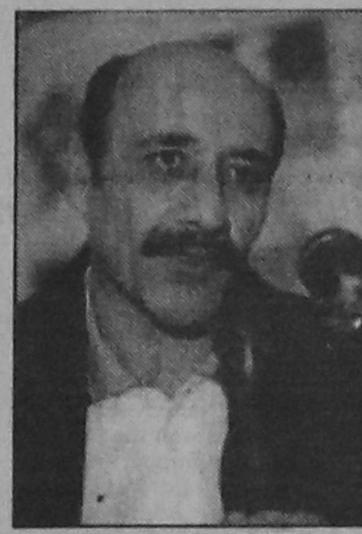
against the United States on US

"We don't want the game to be seen as political," midfielder Mohammad Khakpoor told a news conference here Tuesday.

"The political issue is mostly brought up by the press. We are here to play games and be a representative of the Iranian people." said Khakpoor. 30, who plays in for the New York-New Jersey Metrostars of Major League Soccer.

Politics overshadowed the last match the two countries played -- in the 1998 World Cup. in France, when Iran beat the United States 2-1.

Relations between Washington and Iran were ruptured in 1979 by the rise to power of an The Hammers will feel they in Iran, and the taking of US hostages in Tehran.



JALAL TALEBI

The Iranians are expected to have strong support in the stands from members of this area's 700,000-strong Iranian community, both against Ecuador and the United States.

"It is really wonderful to be greeted" by members of the Iranian community, coach Jalal Talebi said. "There is a lot of

American side without their Midfielder Karim Bagheri,

But they will have to face the

24. did not come with the team for its three-game tour of the United States, and was not on hand when Iran lost to Mexico

2-1 on Sunday in Oakland. Bagheri, who plays for Arminia in the German league, was kept off the team for "family reasons," coach Jalal Talebi said.

While the two countries are moving slowly toward normalizing relations, the United States maintains an economic embargo against Iran, and accuses Tehran of abetting international terrorism.

The Iranian team had to stop in Frankfurt, Germany, on January 5 to pick up US visas, because the two countries do not have diplomatic relations. Iran agreed to the trip only

after the State Department and the US Soccer Federation assured them the delegation would not have to be fingerprinted to get visas. US immigration officials often fingerprint Iranians entering the United States.

The only other top-level sporting exchanges involving visits between the two countries since 1979 have been wrestling competitions.

Sunday's game will be televised by the ESPN cable sports channel in the United States, and Iranian television.

# Ancelotti pins hopes on Zidane



12: Coach Carlo Ancelotti reckons that Zinedine Zidane can win the championship

for Juventus this season, after the Frenchman's outstanding performance at the weekend, reports AFP. Rated 7.5 out of 10 by a rap-

turous Italian press for his role in their 1-1 draw at Parma, Zidane played perhaps his best match since winning the World Cup final for France in July The feat was not lost on An-

celotti, who took over the club in February last year and has coaxed them back towards the top of Italian football, with the Help of Filippo Inzaghi and Alessandro Del Piero. "The key to the match was

the work of the attackers, and in particular Zidane, who was given space and who took full adavntage of it." Ancelotti told reporters here. "But Zidane was also able to

create a great deal because Del Piero and Inzaghi were making all the right moves." And he summed up: "I think I

saw the best Juventus perfor-

TURIN, Italy, Jan mance since I came to Turin, and that includes the victory over AC Milan. It's a very important achievement."

As for Zidane, he said: "I've had lots of 'phone calls from people who were thrilled at the way he played. 'Zizou' was super on Sunday. When he plays like that, he takes the match in hand and the whole team bene-



"Last season, he wasn't in shape physically. But if he keeps on playing like this, you may as well call the rest of the

championship off." Zidane is also convinced of his team's chances this season, despite the bitter frustration of having thrown away two points by conceding an injury-time equaliser on Sunday.

"It's true, I was very angry." he said. "Losing two points when you're playing against a team who only have nine men is hard to swallow

"But you always have to look at the positive side when things go wrong. And the match against Parma showed one very important thing - that if we keep playing like this, we will finish up winning something Ancelotti's men are still in

the UEFA and Italian Cup tournaments, as well as lying just one point behind league leaders Lazio after swapping places at the weekend.

We got confirmation that we can win the championship," Zidane said. "We played the game we wanted to play. And all we needed was a second goal."

## ZINEDINE ZIDANE

Australian Open

Hingis, Agassi top seedings

MELBOURNE, Jan 12 (AP/Reuters): Andre Agassi and Martina Hingis, the respective world No 1s in men's and women's tennis, were named Wednesday as top seeds for the Australian Open starting January, 17 in Melbourne.

Agassi is seeded ahead of de-fending titlist Yevgeny Kafel-nikov of Russia and former World No 1 Pete Sampras.

Hingis, defending titlist and winner of three successive Australian Open championships, was seeded above American World No 2 Lindsay Davenport with Serena Williams named as third seed.

The men's fourth to 10th seeds, in order, are: Nicolas Kiefer of Germany, Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil, Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, Nicolas Lapentti of Equador, American Todd Martin, Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands and Tommy Haas o Germany.

Australia's Pat Rafter, Marcelo Rios of Chile and Britain's Greg Rusedski have all withdrawn due to injuries. French players dominate the

women's fourth to 10th seedings with Mary Pierce at No 4. Nathalie Tauziet at No 5 Amelie Mauresmo at No 7 and Julie Halard-Decugis at No 9.

Australian Barbara Schett is seeded No 6. South Africa's Amanda Coetzer is No 8 and Conchita Martinez of Spain is seeded 10th

US players Monica Seles and Venus Williams both withdrew from the season-opening Grand Slam this week.

Men's seeds announced today for the Australian Open starting on Monday at Melbourne Park:

MEN

1. Agassi (US) 2. Kafelnikov (Russia) 3. Sampras (US) 4. Kiefer (Germany)

5. Kuerten (Brazil) 6. Enqvist (Sweden) 7. Lapentti (Ecuador) 8. Martin (US) 9. Krajicek (Ned)

10. Haas (Germany)

11. Henman (Britain) 12. Norman (Sweden) 13. Pioline (France) 14. Kucera (Slovakia) 15. Costa (Spain)

16. Philippoussis (Aus)

WOMEN Wemen's seeds announced today for the Australian Open: Hingis (Swi)

2. Davenport (US) 3. S Williams (US) 4. Pierce (France) 5. Tauziat (France) 6. Schett (Austria)

7. Mauresmo (France) 8. Coetzer (Rsa) 9. Halard-Decugis (France) 10. Martinez (Spain)

11. Kournikova (Russia) 12. Testud (France) 13. Sanchez-Vicario (Spain) 14. Van Roost (Belgium)

15. Huber (Germany) 16. Likhovtseva (Russia) Haas may miss

Aussie Open AUCKLAND, Jan 12: Germany's Tommy Haas, the beaten top seed at the Auckland Open tennis tournament Wednesday, may miss the Australian Open if he can't overcome a troublesome hip problem, reports AP.

Haas, who finished last year ranked 11th, was beaten by unknown Spanish qualifier Juan Balcells 6-4, 7-5. He struggled with the swirling winds as well as the aggressive game of the Spaniard.

Balcells played the doubles match in Spain's 5-0 win over New Zealand last September and said he had enjoyed New Zealand so much he decided to play in Auckland instead of going to Sydney where he was last year. Haas, suffering from a touch

of the flu, offered few excuses after the loss and praised his 24year-old opponent, whose only other feat of note was a win over the then 15th-ranked Spaniard Carlos Moya last year. But Haas, who made last

year's semifinals in Melbourne, said he would not play next week if he could not figure out what was wrong with his left His coach David Ayme said after Haas' three-set victory

round that he was suffering from a chronic hip flexor muscle problem. He's had it for a while and it hadn't been a major problem, it

over Jeff Tarango in the first

only resurfaced this week." Ayme said. Haas said Wednesday it affected him when he served and

he sometimes lost feeling in his

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"I don't know how bad it is. but I have a problem pushing off on serve and when I make a move I sometimes don't feel the leg, it feels like I'm only on one leg," he said.

Fifth seeded Thomas Johansson joined Haas in a second-round exit after being beaten 6-2, 6-3 by Magnus Gustafsson. Defending champion and sixth seed Sjeng Schalken made

his way into the quarterfinals with a 6-4, 6-1 win over qualifier Tomas Behrend of Ger-Seventh-seeded Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero also made his way into the final eight with

a win over compatriot Alberto

Martin 6-7 (2-7), 6-2, 6-4. Former World No 2 Michael Chang survived another threeset epic, taking two hours, 31 minutes before prevailing over friend and compatriot Michael Sell 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7-1).

"It is very hard playing against someone who is a good friend," Chang said. "He knows your game well and today it was another tough game over three sets and with a lot of long points.

Chang plays 1994 champion Gustafsson in the quarterfinals on Thursday.



Former German tennis superstar Steffi Graf stands next to a scoreboard bearing her boyfriend Andre Agassi's name at the Kooyong Classic at Melbourne yesterday.

Along with himself and

Krajicek also feels he will be

Agassi. Sampras rated Kafel-

nikov. Enqvist and Philippous-

sis as leading threats to win the

# Sampras' winning start triumphed two points later with



MELBOURNE, Jan 12: Pete Sampras, trying to regain the top ranking. started the 2000 season with a

satisfying achievement Wednesday— beating a man who had won four of their last five matches, reports AP.

Sampras was unable to cash in on his first four match points, but finally overcame Richard Krajicek 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 in nearly two hours in the Colonial Classic, a warm-up for the Australian Open.

He now has a 4-6 record against the Dutch player, who plays a similar style of serve and volley game.

· "Playing Richard is not easy because he serves so big. It was a good match to get through," said Sampras, who skipped the Australian last year because of fatigue. He managed to gain some rest late last year, and "this is probably the freshest I've felt in many years coming down here." Andre Agassi, who took over

the No 1 ranking last year after

Sampras had held it at year-end

for six consecutive years.

breezed through his first match of the year, needing less than an hour to beat Wayne Ferreira 6-2, 6-4. "It was a good start. These

were tough conditions - not

only hot, but it plays really

quick on a day like today and the ball was jumping around pretty good. I felt like I was pretty much controlling the ball," said Agassi, the French and US Open champion.

Defending Australian Open champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov fell 7-6, 6-7, 6-1 to Mark Philippoussis, who slammed in 25 aces.

But in his preparations for the year's first Grand Slam tournament, he still will have two more matches in the losers' bracket of this event, an eightman invitational that includes the top four men- Agassi. Kafelnikov, Sampras and Thomas Enqvist- plus No 6 Nicolas Kiefer, no 10 Krajicek, No 19 Philippoussis, and No 53

Ferreira. "I felt like I was hitting the ball well," Kafelnikov said, and "to get any type of matches against those guys is definitely a huge advantage" heading into the Jan 17-30 Australian Open. Kafelnikov said.

Against Sampras, Krajicek saved one match point in the final set's 10th game with a serve and volley and two more in the 12th with a backhand volley that trickled over the net cord and another volley into

the corner. In the tiebreaker, Sampras reached 6-4 with a forehand

passing shot down the line, and

"For a first match after a couple of months, I'm not too unhappy," he said. In a stellar year in which he completed a climb back to the top from a ranking as low as

a strong serve.

ready to challenge.

Australian.

141st in 1997. Agassi still has a disappointment from which to rebound. He lost the 1999 year-ending ATP Tour World Championship final to Sampras, who also beat him in the Wimbledon final before sliding from the No 1

ranking because of a back injury just before the US Open. "I put too much pressure on myself. ... I was discouraged for about 12 hours," Agassi said. "I feel highly motivated," the

29-year-old American added. "I believe as long as I am staying healthy, getting stronger physically, I can play even better tennis." And, he said, "I have way too

much appreciation these days for what it takes to come back again, and I have a hunch that if I slipped, that would be the Agassi downplayed talk of a rivalry with Sampras, saying

the men's field includes many players who can stand in the way of the two meeting in late rounds of a tournament. Sampras added: "In today'sgame, it's tough to have two guys

always playing in the finals of Philippoussis agreed with a number of the players who said the ball and court conditions seemed quicker than last year

in Australia. "I'm not complaining," said the 23-year-old big hitter, who evened his record against Kafelnikov at 3-3.

### Views joins Monica

MELBOURNE, Jan 12: Venus Williams became the second leading American to withdraw from next week's Australian Open within two days when she notified organisers Wednesday that she was pulling out due to tendonitis of her left wrist, re-

Monica Seles, a four-time champion, withdrew Tuesday saying she was still not ready to play after a foot injury suffered last October.

ports AP.

Williams was replaced as No. 3 seed in the women's draw by younger sister Serena, winner at last year's US Open.

"I'm really sad to miss the first Grand Slam because I've been working really had and I was really looking forward to playing," Venus Williams said.

Serena Williams is seeded behind Martina Hingis, a threetime winner at the Australian Open, and American Lindsay Davenport, who're both competing this week at the Adidas International at Sydney's new Olympic venue.

## World No 1 Andre Agassi of the United States plays a yesterday. Agassi won 6-2, 6-4. CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer ACROSS 55 MPH, for 21 Slithery 36 "Home 1 Smyrna instance Improve-

forehand return against South African Wayne Ferreira during their Kooyong Classic encounter in Melbourne - AFP photo

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KIRMXRKZO KVLKOV RH GL SVVO Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I HEAR THAT MOST ELVES LIVING IN CITIES CALL THEMSELVES

Today's Cryptoquip clue: K equals P The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the

METRO-GNOMES.

puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

#### Ljubicic mauls Martin by reports that she was the love-SYDNEY, Jan 12: through 6-3, 6-2. Unseeded Hechild of one of America's great-Croatian Ivan

Ljubicic scored a major upset Wednesday sending defending champion and No.3 seed Todd Martin crashing out of the Sydney International in straight sets.

reports AFP.

draw after Frenchman Fabrice Santoro withdrew on Monday. won 7-6. 6-4 to line up a quarterfinal clash with fifth seed Karol Kucera. Earlier, Russian starlet Anna Kournikova joined Lindsay Davenport and Martina

Hingis in the quarters after a

In the night session the

world No.77, who only made the

gritty fightback against Jennifer Capriati. Down 1-4 in the first set, the 18-year-old Kournikova, seeded eight, reeled off five games in a row to take the set before a dingdong battle in the second saw her steal victory 6-4, 7-5 in 70

the day but the comeback of the day belonged to Belgium's Dominique Van Roost. In blustery conditions, she looked out of her depth in the first set against No.7 seed Amanda Coetzer, crashing 6-0. but fought back in the second to

It was the glamour contest of

take it 7-5 and wrapped up the match 6-4 in the third. Kournikova, searching for her first tournament victory in 67 attempts, said she has learnt to be more patient in her game and that paid off against

Capriati. She plays American Alexandra Stevenson in the next round in another tie certain to capture the public's attention.

Nineteen-year-old Steven-

son arrived at Wimbledon as an

amateur last year and made it

to the semi's, but then she and her mother became embroiled in a row over prize money. This was followed by allegations of racism and lesbianism

## NZ names Davis Cuppers

on the women's tour and capped

AUCKLAND, Jan 12: Newcomer James Shorthall heads a four-man New Zealand Davis Cup team announced Wednesday by captain Glen Wilson for its opening match against Thailand in Timaru, New Zealand in

February, reports AP. Mark Nielsen, Alistair Hunt and James Greenhagh were also named in the squad for the Asia-Oceania group one match from Feb. 4-6.

The Thai team includes Paradon Srichapan, ranked 106th in the world and an impressive performer at last week's Hopman Cup in Perth where Thailand was beaten in the final by South Africa.

est basketball players, Julius

Erving. Elsewhere in the women's draw. No.3 seed Mary Pierce steamrollered Spain's Conchita Martinez 6-1, 6-4 while Davenport looked comfortable as she eased into the quarter's 6-1, 6-2 against Russia's Elena Likhovt-

It was Davenport's first match of the year, following a bye in the opening round. Her next opponent will be Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario who disposed of Australian

favourite Jelena Dokic 6-4, 6-1,

much to the dismay of the partisan crowd. French No.6 seed Amelie Mauresmo had a day-off after Silvija Talaja forfeited their match after a left hamstring strain while Hingis made the

last 16 on Tuesday after easily beating Olga Barabanschikova. Australian Lleyton Hewitt, fresh from his victory at the Men's Hardcourt Championships in Adelaide, wasted no time in sending Spanish veteran Francisco Clavet back to

the dressing room, storming

witt is enjoying a rich vein of form -- this was his seventh straight win -- and will progress to the semi's if he can dispatch Romania's Adrian Voinea, also unseeded, who moved into the last 16 with a 7-5, 6-2 win over Czech Daniel Vacek.

Hewitt said he was enjoying being the local hope but there were areas of his game that needed work ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne next

There was no such joy for fellow Aussie Andrew Ilie who was sent packing 6-3, 7-5 by Slava Dosedel of the Czech Republic. Kuccra, meanwhile, dominated net play against France's

Arnaud Clement to ease

through 6-2, 6-4 while second seed Nicolas Lapentii recovered from an early setback to beat Austria's Stefan Koubek 4-6, 6-0, 6-4. Spain's Alex Corretja overcame Hicham Arazi of Morocco 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 and Australian Ja-

son Stoltenberg sneaked

through against seventh seed

Dominik Hrbaty 6-4, 2-6, 6-4.



Russian Anna Kournikova celebrates after beating Jennifer Capriati of the United States in the Sydney international yesterday. Kournikova won 6-4, 7-5. - AFP photo