

Cook Hants' coach

CENTURION, South Africa. Jan 15: Former South Africa Test opening batsman Jimmy Cook said he had accepted a three-year contract to coach English county Hampshire, reports Reuters.

Thatcher elbowed out of England reckoning

LONDON, Jan 15: Wimbledon's former England Under-21 captain Ben Thatcher may have thought he got off lightly with a two match ban for elbowing Sunderland's Nicky Summerbee two weeks ago on Friday he was counting the real cost - a call up to the England national squad, reports AFP.

England coach Kevin Keegan admitted that he had been poised to pick the leftback for next month's friendly against Argentina but will now rule him out.

"I think Thatcher, until last week, was someone we were looking at. I thought there is one who probably would be in the next squad and probably will not now," Keegan said.

Clijsters upsets Rubin

HOBART, Jan 15: Sixteen-year-old Kim Clijsters of Belgium upset defending champion Chanda Rubin of the United States 2-6, 6-2, 6-2 Saturday to win the singles final at the Tasmanian International tennis tournament, reports AP.

Maradona's no to cocaine?

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 15: Troubled Argentinian football legend Diego Maradona vowed Friday to give up his drug habit in the first interview since he was admitted to a Uruguayan clinic 10 days ago, reports AFP.

Maradona, now recuperating in Buenos Aires, told Fox Sports Channel that he was determined to mend his ways. "I will pull myself up because I do not want the kids to do it," he said.

Australian Open starts tomorrow Martina, Pete chase records

MELBOURNE, Jan 15 (Reuters): For Pete Sampras it is a place where history awaits, while Andre Agassi calls it simply a "sweet court."

a good week and continued training all the way through to coming down here. The prospect of faster courts at the Open - with the balls bouncing higher as the courts heat up in the Australian summer - are expected to favour the likes of defending champion



MARTINA HINGIS and second seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov...

Hingis claimed her third straight crown when she beat France's Amelie Mauresmo in last year's final but little has gone right for her since then in a clumsy fall from grace.

NO LESS ATTRACTION ON WOMEN'S SIDE

The absence of former fifth seed Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil or Germany's Nicolas Kiefer, the fourth seed, in the semifinals.

Her popularity first slipped when she described the muscular, openly gay Mauresmo as "half a man" before their Australian Open final, then plummeted to rock bottom after her graceless, sulking behaviour during her French Open final loss to Graf.

She was beaten in the first round at Wimbledon after falling out with her mother Melanie then lost the US Open final to Serena Williams.

Her one saving grace was that she still managed to finish the year on top of the rankings and she is hoping for a better time in 2000.

"It's good for me to be back in Australia. I have fond memories of here," Hingis said.

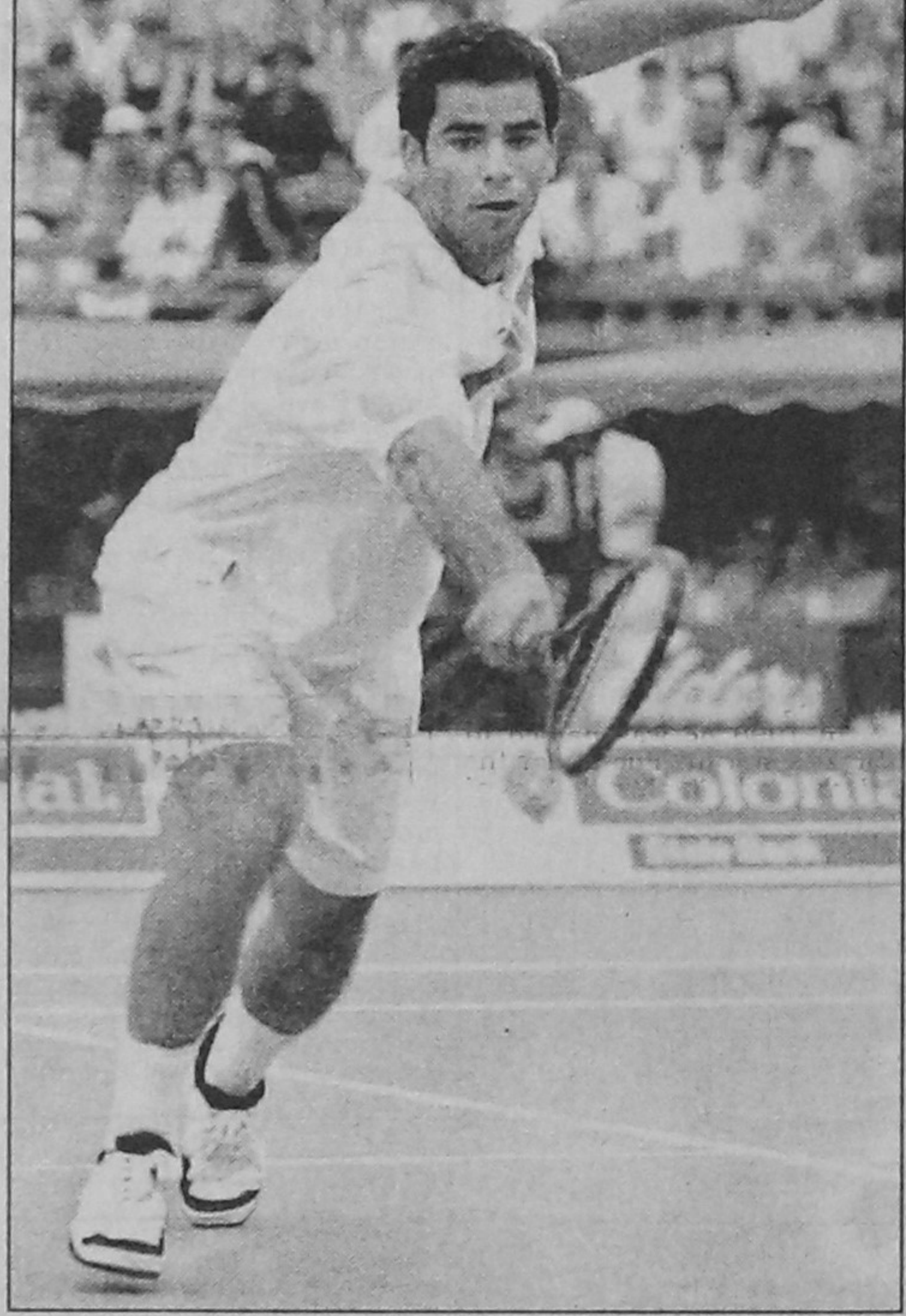
"I feel that I am playing well again and I expect to do well at the Australian Open."

Hingis' main threat at the Open is Lindsay Davenport, the world number two.

The American began 1999 ranked number one but lost her top billing to Hingis shortly after Melbourne. Her consolation came when she took her Swiss rival's Wimbledon title.

Fitter and Slimmer than at the start of previous seasons, Davenport looms as Hingis' biggest danger though she says Serena Williams is as big a worry.

"There are a lot of great players but Martina and Serena are really going to be the hardest to



Pete Sampras in action against fellow American Vince Spadea at the Kooyong Classic yesterday. -AFP photo

champions Graf and Monica Seles and the late withdrawal of American Venus Williams have done little to detract from another intriguing battle between the world's top women at next week's Australian Open.

Indeed the first Grand Slam of the new Millennium is shaping up to be one of the most competitive in years with the women's competition threatening to overshadow the men's in terms of drama and controversy.

Martina Hingis, the world number one and defending champion, is once again the centre of attention both on and off the court.

The Swiss teenager is chasing a record fourth straight title on the Melbourne Park Centre Court after joining Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong-Cawley, Graf and Seles as the only women to win three in a row during the Open era.

Auckland Open Norman's

AUCKLAND, Jan 15: Sweden's Magnus Norman overcame a spiritless start in the final of the \$130,000 Auckland Open tennis tournament to beat Michael Chang of the United States, reports Reuters.

Norman eventually triumphed in three sets over Chang 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 in a game that appeared to remain wide open until the final match point was secured.

Norman, ranked 15 in the ATP tour at the end of 1999, conceded just one set in his five matches in the tournament. The first set of the final was marred by five double faults from the normally accurate Swede.

He came back strongly to take the third set with authoritative play, with the eleventh game in the third and final set proving decisive.

"Michael had 40-love in that game and I was starting to concentrate on the tiebreaker a little bit, actually, I went for a couple of shots that were really lucky in that game," Norman told the crowd at the presentation ceremony.

When you have confidence, those kinds of things come to you and I was just very lucky and I'm happy to win the tournament," he said.

Runner-up Chang, on his first visit to New Zealand, congratulated Norman and wished him well for the Australian Open in the coming weeks.

"I was hoping I could get you in that third set tiebreaker. Third set tiebreakers have been good to me this week, but you played very well," Chang said.

First round men's singles matches for the Australian Open start in Melbourne on Monday.



Australian Lleyton Hewitt stretches to make a forehand return against Jason Stoltenberg in the Sydney International final yesterday. -AFP photo

Amelie, Lleyton titlists

SYDNEY, Jan 15: Amelie Mauresmo made it back-to-back wins over the world's two top-ranked players Saturday, beating defending titlist Lindsay Davenport in the Adidas International final just a day after ousting No 1 Martina Hingis, reports AP.

The sixth-seeded Mauresmo fought back from a break down and then clinched a first-set tiebreaker on six successive winners en route to a 7-6, 6-4 win over the No 2 seed.

An unknown quantity last year, Mauresmo reached the 1999 Australian Open final as a qualifier. But wins this week

over French compatriot Mary Pierce, Hingis and Davenport have made her a leading contender for next week's Grand Slam.

The 20-year-old fired five aces Saturday against Davenport - the fifth giving her a championship point - and drilled a series of strong ground strokes to overpower the American.

Mauresmo said beating three top five players in a week means "my game is really coming together - now I'm at a high level and I want to stay there."

"It gives you a lot of confidence to get this momentum against the top players," she said. "It feels great. Every match

is better and better - my shape also, I'm very happy with what I've done."

Davenport said she made too many unforced errors at critical times.

"Whenever I needed to play well, I was the one coming up with errors on big points," she said. "It's a wake-up call for the next two weeks."

Davenport said that if Mauresmo can reproduce this week's form, "she's definitely a chance" in Melbourne.

Mauresmo and Davenport are now level 3-3 in head-to-heads, with Mauresmo adding the Adidas International to her wins in last year's Australian Open semifinal and at the Paris Indors.

The former world junior No 1 rose to prominence in the buildup to the Australian Open final last year - a match overshadowed by controversy after three-time champion Hingis reportedly described Mauresmo as "half a man."

Mauresmo is seeded No 7 in Melbourne and will face Spaniard Cristina Torrens Valero in the opening round. The second-seeded Davenport was drawn to meet Sarah Pitkowski of France in the first round.

Earlier, Lleyton Hewitt claimed back-to-back titles and charged to the top of the ATP 2000 Champions race with a 6-4, 6-0 thrashing of Jason Stoltenberg in the men's final.

Hewitt extended his unbeaten stretch to 10 matches, picking up 35 points Saturday to add to the 35 points he earned by winning last week's Australian Hardcourt Championship in Adelaide.

After the opening two weeks of the season, the 18-year-old Aussie now holds No 1 spot in the revamped ranking system, although he goes into Australian Open as an unseeded player.

Hewitt dominated Saturday's all-Australian decider from the first game, when he broke Stoltenberg, before trading breaks to level at 4-4. But he won the next eight games to clinch the match in 53 minutes.

Hewitt couldn't repeat the success in the men's doubles final where he and Sandon Stolle lost 7-5, 6-4 to compatriots Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge, who were doubles winners at the Australian Hardcourt championships.

School named after Flo-Jo

LOS ANGELES, Jan 15: The elementary school Florence Griffith Joyner attended in poverty-ridden South-Central Los Angeles has been named in honour of the late US sprint star, reports AFP.

Al Joyner, the 1984 Olympic triple jump champion, said his late wife spoke often of 102nd Street Elementary School, which was renamed Florence Griffith Joyner Elementary School on Friday.

"Just looking out here, and to know that her dreams started here, and it carried her all over the world," Joyner said. "She never forgot where she came from."

Griffith Joyner, instantly recognizable on the track by her one-legged champion, flowing hair and fabulously painted fingernails, died at her home in Mission Viejo, near San Diego, in September of 1998 at the age of 38.

"Flo-Jo" had become an Olympic legend in Seoul in 1988 winning golds in the 100 and 200m as well as being a member of the successful US relay team.

She set a new 200m world record in those Games, having already set the standard for the 100m in the US Olympic trials.

"Flo-Jo's success is especially meaningful and inspirational to our students because she grew up right in this school neighbourhood," said Frances Hayward, the school's principal.

MLS confident of bringing Lothar to USA

NEW YORK, Jan 15: Major League Soccer officials tried to downplay Lothar Matthaeus' recent comments, saying Friday in Germany that he may not come and play for the New York/New Jersey MetroStars, citing a "breach of contract," reports AFP.

"I was caught of guard by his comments but I am confident that Lothar will still come and play in the United States," said MLS Executive Vice-President, Ivan Gazidis, in charge of all player transactions, Friday in New York.

The German star expressed his displeasure about the recent changes made to the MetroStars without being consulted.

The New York/New Jersey club departed ways with General manager Charles Stillitano Wednesday with whom Matthaeus had a close relationship.

"I understand his concerns but one Lothar meets the new coach (Octavio Zambrano) and the new General Manager (Nick Sakiewicz), he will be very comfortable with them and his mind will be put to rest," said Gazidis.

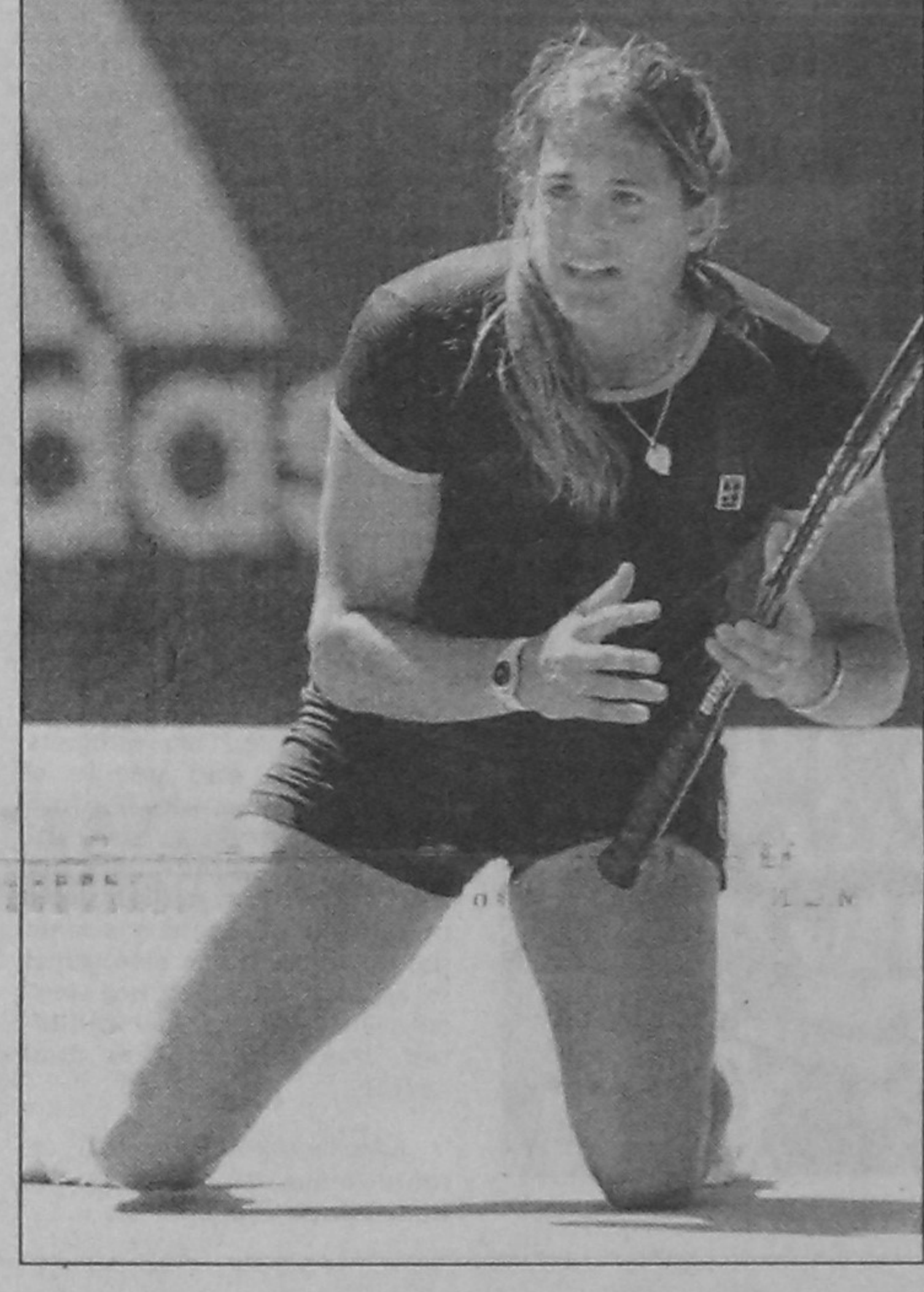
Stillitano along with former coach Bora Milutinovic were instrumental in persuading Matthaeus to move to the MetroStars.

Matthaeus, 38, was initially scheduled to come to the United States as soon as December 31. But he decided to extend his contract with Bayern Munich and put off his move to New York in order to help the Bundesliga club.

Matthaeus' comments came just after receiving Germany's player of the year award, voted by his Bundesliga peers Friday. The German star, a veteran of five World Cup, is still supposed to make his MLS debut on March 18 against the Miami Fusion.

"Obviously there has been a number of changes in metrostar's management over the last six weeks and I can understand how Lothar feels," said Sakiewicz.

"However Lothar has a contract with MLS and I expect him to honour it and arrive Friday March 10th. I want to schedule a face to face meeting with Lothar and coach Zambrano. Once he meets us he will be more motivated than ever to join us and be a major part of our upcoming season and its future success."



Frenchwoman Amelie Mauresmo starts to rejoice after the Sydney International final yesterday. -AFP photo

Something's better than nothing

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Pete Sampras breezed past Vincent Spadea 6-3, 6-1 Saturday in an exhibition match after the Kooyong Classic's final and its third-placed match, reports AP.

With the Australian Open starting in two days, Mark Philippoussis woke up with a stiff neck and pulled out of his scheduled final with top-ranked Andre Agassi. Thomas Enqvist already had withdrawn from the third-place match with Sampras to rest a sore serving shoulder before the open.

Sampras said he had agreed to play Agassi to provide a final-day marquee match for the 5,500 spectators at Kooyong Stadium, but "unfortunately it didn't happen."

Instead organisers proceeded with a match between Sampras and the 20th-ranked Spadea, who had been enlisted to replace Enqvist before Philippoussis' withdrawal several hours before the scheduled final.

Sampras said that playing Agassi would "not necessarily have been a better preparation for the open."

"The main concern is just to play matches. Andre is one of the best players out there and so it would have been a good test.

but I'm playing in a couple of days at the Open and that's obviously the main concern."

Against Spadea, "it was nice to play some baseline points and play someone that stays back," Sampras said.

His two earlier matches in this tournament were against players with big serve-and-volley games. He beat Richard Krajicek, but then lost 7-6, 7-6 to Philippoussis in a semifinal Friday.

"It was nice to get a little more of a hit up, and I played pretty well and I liked my form," said Sampras, who was set back by a back injury last year and fell to No 3 after finishing at No 1 for six consecutive years.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. A crossword puzzle grid with clues for across and down words.

CRYPTOQUIP. A word puzzle with a grid and clues. Includes a section for 'yesterday's answer' and 'today's answer'.



A fan of Diego Maradona holding a poster while waiting outside a Buenos Aires clinic where the Argentine soccer legend has been recuperating from heart ailment on January 14. -AFP photo