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

· Her popularity first slipped

when she described the muscu-

lar, openly gay Mauresmo as

"half a man" before their Aus-

tralian Open final, then plum-

meted to rock bottom after her

graceless, sulking behaviour

during her French Open final

round at Wimbledon after

falling out with her mother

Melanie then lost the US Open

that she still managed to finish

the year on top of the rankings

and she is hoping for a better

Australia. I have fond memo-

again and I expect to do well at

Open is Lindsay Davenport, the

ranked number one but lost her

top billing to Hingis shortly af-

ter Melbourne. Her consolation

came when she took her Swiss

the start of previous seasons

Davenport looms as Hingis

biggest danger though she says

Serena Williams is as big a

ers but Martina and Serena are

really going to be the hardest to

There are a lot of great play-

Fitter and Slimmer than at

rival's Wimbledon title.

ries of here," Hingis said.

the Australian Open.

world number two.

final to Serena Williams.

She was beaten in the first

Her one saving grace was

"It's good for me to be back in

"I feel that I am playing well

Hingis' main threat at the

The American began 1999

a clumsy fall from grace.

loss to Graf.

time in 2000.

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.

"I'd like to put something back into county cricket after three successful years at Somerset," Cook said on Friday. "I also see it as a chance to help young South African players in England.

Lancashire made me an offer a few years ago which I turned down and I've always regretted it.

Ali Bacher, managing director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, said Cook, the board's director of coaching, would be sorely missed.

"Jimmy will be a big loss as he was an enthusiastic director of coaching," Bacher said. "We will advertise the post but if possible we will try to use Jimmy during the English winter months.

Cook played for Transvaal and English county Somerset in a first-class career which stretched from 1972-73 to 1994-

His Test career was restricted to only three matches by South Africa's isolation from international sport because of the country's apartheid policies. He also played four one-day internationals.

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 Summer--bee two weeks ago but 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.

Thatcher burst onto the scene as a hard-tackling, quick and aggressive defender with Wimbledon's fellow London club Millwall, who could play left-back or in central defence.

He earned international honours with the under-21s but blotted his copy-book in Italy in October 1997 when he was sent off, and was one of five players disciplined by coach Peter Taylor for an off-the-field incident.

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.

Clijsters, ranked 43rd in the world, went through the qualifiers to the fourth round of last year's Wimbledon before losing to Stelli Graf. Then she made the third round of the US Open before losing 7-5 in the third to eventual winner Serena Williams.

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. The 39-year-old's doctors

have since revealed he has a severe heart condition and have also said his life was in danger when he was first admitted to hospital after what has now been revealed to be a cocaine overdose.

Maradona was sometimes rambling as he made his first statements to the media since his collapse but revealed that he would be "enchanted" to be treated in Cuba with whose president Fidel Castro he has a good relationship.

However, he revealed he would be more likely to go to Canada although he discounted speculation he would be treated in the United States, saying:

"There, they will not let me in." Maradona, who led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup, was speaking from the Buenos Aires Sagrado Corazon (Sacred Heart) clinic but although he clearly found speaking an effort he still managed a couple of jibes at Brazilian legend Pele and the Brazilian former FIFA

president Joao Havelange. Dressed in a sky blue shirt and noticeably thinner he said he had never felt so ill when he was admitted to the Uruguayan clinic 10 days ago - he had been on holiday with his family in

Punta del Este. He said he had assured his daughters Dalma and Gianina that he was better but added: When you are talking about the heart it is difficult to be cer-

tain. He added: "I will do everything to get out of this mess

(drugs). Maradona paid tribute to his agent Guillermo Coppola who has been interviewed by Uruguayan investigators into

the matter. Maradona said Coppola "had

saved his life".

Australian Open starts tomorrow

Martina, Pete chase records



a place where history awaits. while Andre Agassi calls it simply a "sweet Both have tasted success on

the Australian Open Centre Court and they will seek further glory at the first Grand Slam tournament of 2000, which starts on Monday. Sampras, hoping to eclipse-Australian Roy Emerson and

become the first man to win 13 Grand Slam singles titles, says he is fresher than he has been in years. Agassi, with girlfriend and former women's world number

one Steffi Graf at his side, is keen to build on the triumphs of 1999 when he won the French and US Open crowns and became only the fifth man to win all four Grand Slam titles in his

Top seed Agassi has a soft spot for the Centre Court - renamed the Rod Laver Arena this year — after having won the title there in 1995.

Just how much he revealed after his first practice session there for this year's Open.

"Good-bye sweet court, be good to me this year," he whispered as he walked off the court after a 90-minute work-out with Graf just two hours after the pair had jetted into Mel-

He and Graf have been the focus of frenzied attention since their arrival but Agassi, predictably, is hoping he can make a bigger splash on court than off

"I have way too much appreciation these days for what it takes to come back again and l have a hunch that if I slipped that would be the end of it." said the 29-year-old Las Vegan, who finished last year as world number one after having tumbled to 122 in 1997. "My goal is to hit every level

I feel I can hit with my game. As an athlete you want to feel like you saw your best and I still think that's ahead of me.

Agassi and Sampras, the third seed, were both placed in the powerful top half when the draw was made on Friday and could meet in the semifinals although both have to work hard in their early matches to earn a showdown.

Agassi faces Argentine Mariano Puerta in the first round and has big-serving Australian Mark Philippoussis looming in the fourth round.

Even if he overcomes Philippoussis, the 16th seed and local favourite, he is likely to have to beat eighth seed Todd Martin in the quarter finals in a US Open final rematch.

Sampras, who missed last year's Australian Open after a hectic end to 1998 left him mentally and physically exhausted, plays dangerous Australian Wayne Arthurs in his first match.

He is scheduled to meet 14th seed Karol Kucera of Slovakia in the fourth round and then face a quarterfinal clash against 1999 finalist Thomas Enqvist of Sweden, the sixth

Sampras was unfazed by the draw or a 7-6, 7-6 loss to Philippoussis in a warm-up event on Friday.

"I feel good. I feel like I'm where I want to be," said the American, eager to make up for an injury-dogged season last

Sampras, 28, won Wimbledon and four other tournaments in 1999 but was hampered for much of the time by injury. He was forced to pull out of the US Open with a back complain and completed only eight tournaments for the year.

Significantly, he finished the year on a high by outplaying Agassi in the final of the ATP Tour World Championship in Hanover, Germany, in November. Sampras also crushed Agassi in the Wimbledon decider.

This year's Open is the first Grand Slam under the revamped ranking system which came into force in the men's game this year. With a straight forward race

in which all players started the year on zero and accumulate points throughout the year, the big guns all know they need to come out firing.

"Mentally and physically I was pretty much at burn-out," Sampras said of missing last year's Australian Open.

"(This year) I'm the freshest I've felt in many years coming down here. I felt I had my offseason after the US Open. I had 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



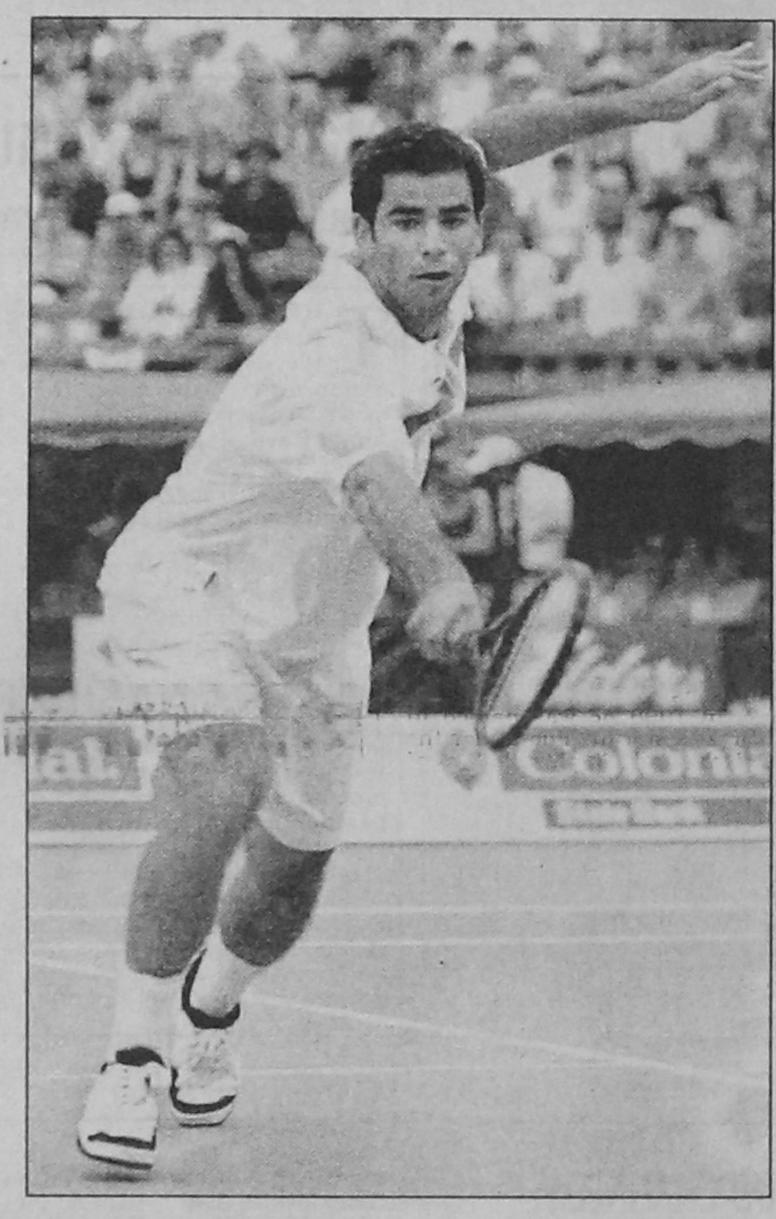
MARTINA HINGIS

and second seed Yevgeny Kafenikov, Philippoussis, ninth seed Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands and Enqvist. Kafelnikov has a far easier

time in the bottom half of the draw, although he has yet to win a match this year. He would most likely face fifth seed Gustavo Kuerten of

Brazil or Germany's Nicolas Kiefer, the fourth seed, in the semifinals. NO LESS

ATTRACTION ON WOMEN'S SIDE The absence of former



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 contro-

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 chas-ing 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.

beat. They have better games and have done it all before,' Davenport said.

The withdrawal of Serena's big sister Venus with tendinitis in her wrist has robbed the tournament of one of its most interesting players and came as a blow to tournament organisers after four-times champion Seles withdrew with a nagging foot injury.

The old stagers such as Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, Conchita Martinez and Mary Pierce have all re-entered and can never be discarded as Open chances.

The new brigade are also pushing their claims. Russian Anna Kournikova is still looking for her first singles title after more than four years as a professional while last year's Wimbledon quarterfinalist Jelena Dokic will carry the hopes of the host nation.



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 -AFP photo

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.

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 racing outfits, flowing hair and fabulously painted fingernails, died at her home in Mission Viejo, near San Diego, in September of 1998 at the age

"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

neighbourood," said Frances

Haywood, the school's princi-

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", re ports 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 Metrosters without being consulted.

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

"I understand his concerns but once 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 Mulitinovic 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 Zembrano. 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."



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

Amelie, Lleyton titlists



SYDNEY, Jan 15: Amelie Mauresmo made it back-toback 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

aces Saturday against Davenport - the fifth giving her a championship point - and drilled a series of strong ground strokes to overpower the Amer-Mauresmo said beating three

The 20-year-old fired five

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

Mauresmo and Davenport are now level 3-3 in head-toheads, with Mauresmo adding the Adidas International to her wins in last year's Australian said. "It feels great. Every match Open semifinal and at the Paris Indoors.

The former world junior No I 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."

is better and better - my shape

also, I'm very happy with what

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well. I was the one coming up-

with errors on big points," she

said. "It's a wake-up call for the

resmo can reproduce this week's

form, "she's definitely a chance"

Davenport said she made too

"Whenever I needed to play

Davenport said that if Mau-

I've done."

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next two weeks."

in Melbourne.

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

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 Hewitt extended his un-

beaten 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 Satur-

day'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.

Something's better than nothing

-AFP photo



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MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Pete Sampras breezed past Vincent Spadea 6-3. 6-1 Saturday in an exhibition

Sydney International final yesterday.

Frenchwoman Amelie Mauresmo starts to rejoice after

beating world number two Lindsay Davenport in the

match after withdrawals wiped out both 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 topranked Andre Agassi. Thomas Enqvist already had withdrawn for the open. from the third-place match with Sampras to rest a sore serving shoulder before the

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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 fi-Sampras said that playing

Agassi would "not necessarily" have been better preparation 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.

By Eugene Sheffer

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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 "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.

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Saturday's Cryptoquip: MIGHT ALL THE

GUARDS AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE BE PRONE 44 Halloween TO DRINK SECURI-TEA? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals S 45 Mamie's

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for we you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

46 Emblem another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe