

Euro 2000
Belgium, Britain
to collaborate
on security

BRUSSELS, Jan 16 (AFP) — The Belgian and British Foreign Ministers said Tuesday that the two countries were collaborating in a bid to avoid crowd trouble at Euro 2000, to be co-hosted by Belgium and Holland next June and July, the Belgia news agency reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

Britain's Foreign Secretary Robin Cook met his Belgian counterpart Louis Michel and insisted there was close collaboration between Britain and both host nations.

Cook said: "We are doing everything to ensure that Euro 2000 goes well. Top level officials from both countries are in permanent contact and are exchanging information so everything goes off in the best possible way."

Belgium is particularly sensitive to the problem of football violence.

In 1985, Brussels staged the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus in which 39 people died after a stampede caused by rioting Liverpool fans.

England's Group A match with bitter rivals Germany in the Belgian city of Charleroi is one obvious flashpoint that Belgian police will be eager to control.

Kiefer keen on
Sydney Games

MELBOURNE, Jan 16: Davis Cup stayaway Nicolas Kiefer says there's "no chance" he will be dropped from Germany's Olympic Games tennis team in retribution for his Cup no-show this year, reports AFP.

Kiefer, preparing here for next week's Australian Open, announced Wednesday he would not be available for the Davis Cup because of his busy ATP Tour playing commitments.

"My schedule is very busy this year, and I've said I'm happy to play Davis Cup for Germany next year and hopefully we're going to win," said Kiefer Thursday.

Kiefer, 22, has not played in the Davis Cup since a fallout last May with team boss Boris Becker, who no longer holds this post.

Asked his reaction to suggestions that the German federation may not choose him in their team for the September Olympics, Kiefer said:

"There is no chance because I'm the number one player and I'm going for the Olympics."

Kiefer said it was his ambition to play at the Olympics.

"It's a great event and it's a chance for me to play at the Olympics. It's every four years, and it will be a great experience for me."

"I saw it on TV when I was young, and the dream is coming."

Kiefer's decision not to play Davis Cup has split German tennis ranks with No. 2 player Tommy Haas saying, "Last month, I am not sure whether Nicolas is a team player, if he has a team spirit... Maybe he thinks more about his personal career."

Trinidad-Reid
bout Mar 3

LAS VEGAS, Jan 16: Felix Trinidad and Olympic gold medalist David Reid will fight one night earlier than planned, with promoter Don King asking Nevada boxing officials for a March 3 bout in an outdoor stadium on the Las Vegas Strip, reports AP.

King had wanted the fight for March 4, but rival promoter had already secured pay-per-view rights for the date for another fight and King was forced to move a bout first announced in November.

King sent a letter to the Nevada Athletic Commission late Thursday asking that the March 3 date be reserved.

Trinidad, coming off a win over Oscar De La Hoya, is moving up to 70 kilos (154 pounds) to challenge Reid for his WBA junior middleweight title in a matchup of two undefeated boxers.

The fight is scheduled for a 10,000-seat outdoor stadium that will be constructed at Caesars Palace.

The promoter Bob Arum thwarted plans for the March 4 date by locking up the pay-per-view capabilities for that night for a fight between WBA bantamweight champion Paulie Ayala and Denmark's Johnny Bredahl.

The two fights are part of a busy Las Vegas weekend in which hotels are expected to be packed with racing fans for the Las Vegas 400 Winston Cup race on March 5 that will draw some 120,000 people to the Las Vegas Speedway.

Jones Jr retains
WBC crown

NEW YORK, Jan 16: Roy Jones Jr remained the undisputed light heavyweight champion of the world with a unanimous decision over fellow American David Telesco at Radio City Music Hall on Saturday night, reports Reuters.

Jones, whose 31st birthday came at midnight as Saturday turned to Sunday, retained the World Boxing Council, World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation championships as two judges scored it 120-108 and the third judge had it 120-106.

Jones, who has won world titles in three weight classes, has lost only once in 43 fights, on a disqualification when he bit Montell Griffin while he was on one knee.

Telesco, also 31, is now 23-3. After the fight, Jones said he had fractured his left wrist 2 1/2 weeks before the fight but refused to back out of it even though he could not make a complete fist and had used only of his right hand.

Likely leading ladies

MELBOURNE, Jan 16 (AFP) — A new season, and with the power hitters coming into their own, it begs the question as to how long three-time Australian Open winner Martina Hingis can keep up with the onslaught.

Depending on who you talk to, the chances of an upset among the women in the first Grand Slam of the season starting here on Monday appear slim with Hingis and Lindsay Davenport the hot favourites.

Others, of course, think differently after French musclewoman Amelie Mauresmo beat Hingis, Davenport and world No. 5 Mary Pierce into submission at Sydney last week.

Her triumph, based around a laser-like backhand and searing serve, made it patently clear she is ready to challenge for the big four this season.

Unknown a year ago, Mauresmo has floored the tennis world with her athleticism. The bouncy Rebound ace surfaced using here seems to suit her game.

She unexpectedly made the final last year and showed over the past week she now has the mental toughness to mix it with the top two.

"There are a lot of tough players to beat in a Grand Slam," said Mauresmo. "I am one of them."

Serena Williams is also in that mould.

The 17-year-old has made an astonishing advance in the past 12 months, winning 17 out of 20 matches against top 10 players, including three against Hingis — most notably the US Open.

The awesome African-American is sitting at a career-high world No. 4 and apart from sister Venus, who's out of the tournament with tendonitis of the left wrist, no other player came close to matching her in strength, confidence and skill last year.

But by opting to miss warm-ups in Hong Kong, the Gold Coast and Sydney, she may lack match practice.

Davenport, beaten in the semis by Mauresmo last year, said every player was different but warned Williams may find it hard to adapt.

"If it's really windy, if it's really, really hot some of those factors can wear on you if you are not used to them, whereas if you have been down here (in Australia) a little longer you are a bit more prepared," she said.

With Steffi Graf retired, serve-and-volley specialist Jana Novotna bowing out and Monica Seles, a four-time Open champion, injured, the field appears wide open.

Davenport, who says she's in better shape than ever, puts Hingis and Williams as her main threats and singled out Pierce as the "second tier" of challengers.

"I really think Martina, the Williams sisters and myself this last year have kind of been the ones — and Steffi but she's retired — that won the big tournaments and came through at the end," she said in Sydney.

"I would look at the top four seeds, Mary (Pierce) as well, but really Martina, Serena and myself are the top favourites."

With the winner taking home 717,000 Australian dollars (466,000 US), there's much to play for.

While Hingis ended the season with the prized No. 1 ranking, Wimbledon champion Davenport, another big-hitter, has a more legitimate claim to the title of world's best player, according to world's best player, according to world's best player, according to world's best player.

Charlton remark irks SA

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 16: Top South African footballer Charlton has dismissed as irrelevant criticism of the country by English bid ambassador Sir Bobby Charlton, reports AFP.

Charlton, a member of the 1966 England World Cup-winning team, told the London Daily Express this week how he regularly received South African newspapers packed with crime stories.

"A badly-organised World Cup, given to a country at the wrong time, would be a disaster," Charlton said while England maintained their role as the major critics of the South African bid.

"South Africans are surprised by the outburst against us from Charlton, but we believe it is not worth responding to," bid committee chief executive Jordaan said in a statement released here.

Jordaan claimed England suffered a public relations disaster due to the poor showing of Manchester United at the first world club championship in Brazil, where they were eliminated after the first round this week.

He believed England were trying to deflect attention from United, who finished third behind Vasco de Gama of Brazil and Nexaca of Mexico in their group, by saying FIFA president Sepp Blatter no longer backed South Africa.

"I had a successful meeting with Blatter in Rio de Janeiro and am confident of his continued support," Jordaan said, referring to a statement by the leader of world football that he had to be neutral regarding bids.

Blatter has repeatedly supported South Africa, saying the quadrennial showcase of international football should be rotated among continents and it was the turn of Africa in 2006 to host the event for the first time.

"South Africa know they are the leading candidate in Africa and, therefore, continue to take great heart from the stance of Blatter. The rules demand his neutrality, but this must not be confused with his belief in the principle of rotation," Jordaan said.

Brazil, Germany and Morocco are also bidding to succeed Japan and South Korea as hosts of the World Cup and the winners will be announced after an early July meeting in Switzerland of the FIFA executive committee.

cording to many in the game. She trounced Hingis in the final of the season-ending Chase Championship in New York and won all three meetings with the Swiss miss last year in straight sets.

Hingis, who only won one Grand Slam in 1999, admits it is shaping up to be a tough tournament, but also pointed to the top three as her main threats.

Serena and Amelie are playing well and she (Mauresmo) seems to be very confident," said Hingis. "Lindsay, Anna (Kournikova), although I think they face each other pretty soon."

The fans favourite will undoubtedly be Kournikova, but a question mark remains over her stamina and ability to rise to the occasion.

She is yet to win a tournament in 67 attempts.

Others to watch include Nathalie Tauziat, Amanda Coetzer and veteran Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario.

National coach Trott Moloto ignored Benni when he chose his 22-strong cup squad only to include him as a standby player on Saturday, reportedly under government pressure, when the Cape Town-born player said he was available.

Moloto later stressed he would include McCarthy only if one of the squad was injured and could not travel to Kumasi, the Ghanaian city where Bafana Bafana (The Boys) play Gabon, DR Congo and Algeria in the first round.

The Sunday World launched a scathing attack on McCarthy, who scored four goals in 13 minutes against Namibia in the previous finals, labelling him a "mercenary" and a "desperate opportunist".

"True patriots do not sulks, but work hard to get back into the starting line-up at their club," the newspaper said, referring to the continual club-versus-country dilemma facing African footballers based in Europe.

"When push came to shove the players of this land stuck with the national team. But an ill-advised McCarthy saw the mercenary route as the ideal one," the World added.

The Sowetan said it was not easy to forget that Benni, who scored 13 goals in 23 international appearances, told the national football association and the people of South Africa to "get lost".

Moloto was praised by the Sunday Times for refusing to accommodate Benni at the expense of a squad member, but warned that the drama could sow confusion among a side considered possible winners of the three-week tournament.

The Star welcomed the availability of Benni, once forced to share boots with his brother due to poverty, but said it would be "morally wrong and totally unacceptable" for him to be included at such a late stage.

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Milutinovic signs with a promise

GUANGZHOU, China, Jan 16: Well-travelled international soccer coach Bora Milutinovic Saturday inked a two-year deal with the China Football Association and has vowed to bag China's first-ever qualification to the World Cup Finals, reports AFP.

Tin delighted to be in China. China is one of the most important sports nation in the world and its football team has great potential," Milutinovic said at a signing ceremony.

"This is the biggest challenge of my life," said Milutinovic who has coached four different countries to World Cup finals — Mexico in 1986, Costa Rica in 1990, the United States in 1994 and Nigeria in 1998.

The coaching assignment would be effective immediately, with an extension offered if the Chinese team qualifies for the 2002 World Cup to be jointly hosted by Japan and South Korea, a CFA spokesman said.

The spokesman denied that the Yugoslav-born coach would be paid an annual salary of 1.2 million dollars as has been widely reported in the Chinese press.

"Bora will be provided with a salary, expenses and a travel budget, while all team costs will also be covered," he said.

Included in the contract was an incentive clause should China win the 2000 Asian Cup and a "very substantial bonus" if the national team qualifies for the 2002 World Cup, he said.

Although the contract was effective immediately, Milutinovic would not be taking complete control over the team until after co-head coaches Jin Zhigang and Chi Shuangbin step down following Asian Cup qualifiers against the Philippines, Guam and Vietnam in Hanoi from January 21-29.

Milutinovic said he would seek to get as many matches for the national side as possible, citing the 292 international matches that he has already coached as an important part to his success.

After watching the Chinese side beat New Zealand 1-0 in a lackadaisical match played Friday night, the Yugoslav coach said the team needed tactical work, while he would also look to bringing in younger players.

Milutinovic's predecessor, Englishman Bobby Houghton, was sacked on December 10 for failing to qualify the Chinese for the Sydney Olympics.

Qualification for the World Cup has become a routine four-year disappointment for Chinese soccer fans, who equate national strength to the success and failures of the national side.

Milutinovic is now the third foreign coach to lead the Chinese team, following Houghton and German Klaus Schlappner who was dismissed in 1993 after failing to qualify for the 1994 World Cup final.

As Japan and South Korea automatically qualify for the 2002 World Cup, Asia has two other qualifying spots and a playoff match with a European team for a third, making Milutinovic's chances better than his predecessors.

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 16: Newspapers were divided here on Sunday after 1998 African Nations Cup star Benni McCarthy moved closer to a dramatic entry to the next finals starting in Ghana and Nigeria this week, reports AFP.

The 22-year-old Spanish-based striker quit international football last September, saying he wanted to concentrate on his waning club career after joining Celta Vigo from Dutch side Ajax.

National coach Trott Moloto ignored Benni when he chose his 22-strong cup squad only to include him as a standby player on Saturday, reportedly under government pressure, when the Cape Town-born player said he was available.

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African Nations Cup
Media cautious
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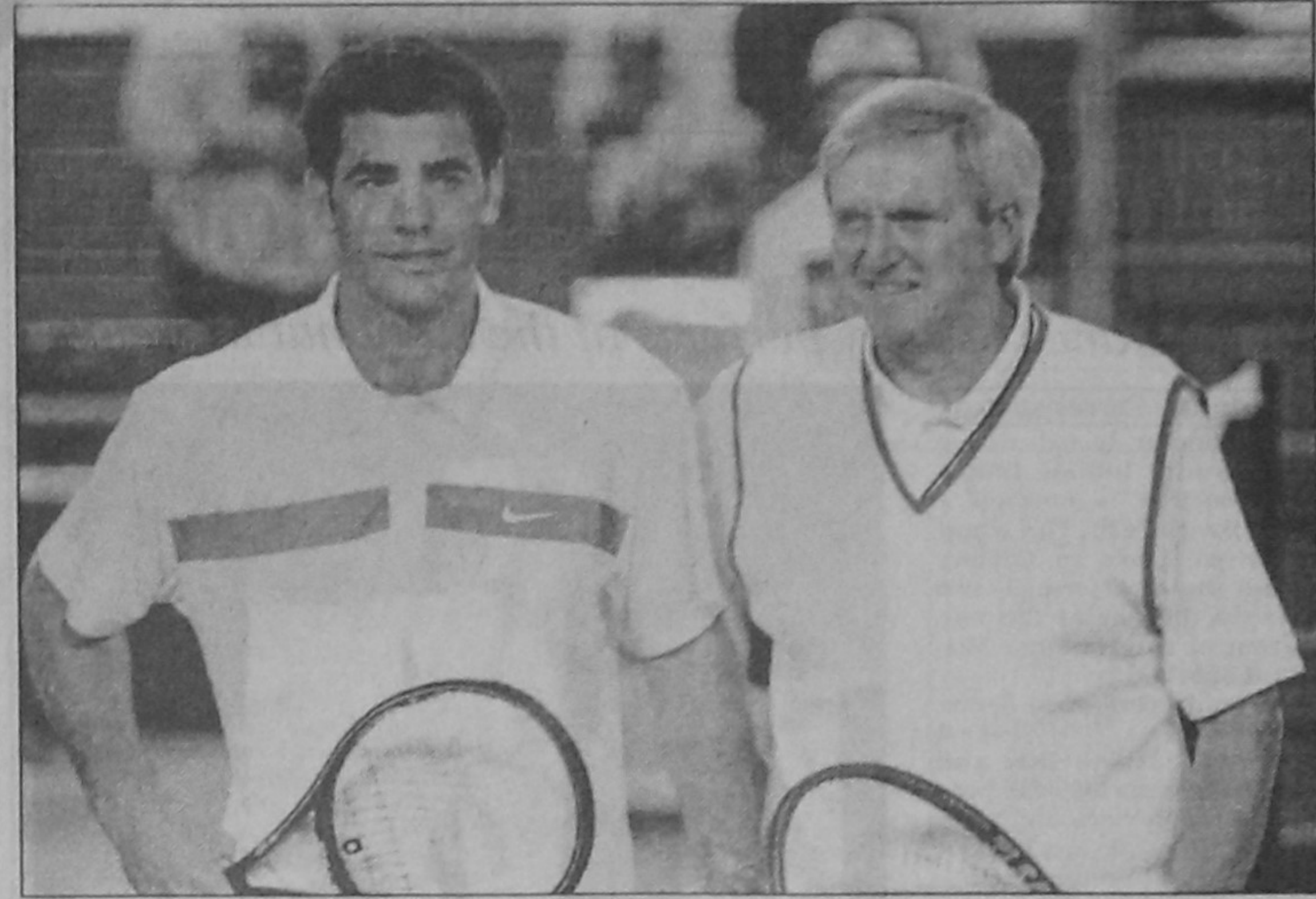
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Pete Sampras (L) and Australia tennis legend Roy Emerson during the opening of the Rod Laver Arena at the Melbourne Park Tennis Centre yesterday. — AFP photo

Emerson endorses Sampras

MELBOURNE, Jan 16 (AFP) — Roy Emerson played in Australian Opens where he brought his own soap and towel, and a nail for a hanger in the dressing room.

He won six of them, accounting for half his record total of 12 Grand Slam titles.

On Sunday, the 63-year-old Emerson went out to hit in the tournament's modern, 15,000-seat stadium with Pete Sampras, the 28-year-old who stands on the verge of breaking that record.

The greatest contemporary player goes into the year's opening major tournament with the same number of Slams as Emerson.

He hit one backhand slice to me that was pretty firm and I was saying I wouldn't want to play him in his prime," said Sampras.

"It was definitely an honour today."

Sampras is expected to pass Emerson's tally sometime this year, if not here then he has a strong possibility of achieving it in July at Wimbledon.

"If Pete's in good health and fit, there's no reason why he can't be number one for a number of years," said grey-haired Emerson.

Good-naturedly, Sampras, sitting alongside him at a press conference, turned and said: "I've already done it for a number of years. Give me a break."

To which, Emerson continued: "But, you're only just beginning with your game, you know. I think you can play many, many years and at top class tennis."

"And with my record of 12 Grand Slams I think if you show good form and play well and keep in good shape, you'll leave that well behind."

Emerson, who won six Australian, two French, two Wimbledon and two US crowns, said Sampras had a great opportunity to surpass his record at the Australian Open.

"Records are to be broken and obviously you'd like a record to last forever, but it's going to happen and I think Pete's got a great opportunity here and I couldn't think of anyone better to do it," he said.

Emerson reached his 12th at the 1967 French Open Sampras caught up with him by winning Wimbledon last year, before being forced out of the US Open with a back injury.

"It would be fitting" to break the record in Australia, Sampras said, "but I must admit I was looking forward to the opportunity to do it at the US Open last year, in my home country, but that wasn't meant to be."

"So maybe it will happen here, and maybe it might happen on the clay — but probably at Wimbledon. You never know," he added.

Sampras has won six Wimbledon, four US Opens and two Australian titles.

In any case, he said, to be with Emerson here and "in a position to maybe break his record is truly overwhelming."

Unlike Emerson, Sampras never has won the Grand Slam tournament played on clay — the French. Emerson admitted to having initial trouble on clay, because he was brought up on grass courts, but "at the end of my career, I preferred playing on clay."

Sampras said he had been putting too much pressure on himself to try to win the French, and this year would "treat it like I do all the other Slams."

Sampras is steeped in the traditions of tennis and re-counts Emerson, along with Australian legends, Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall, as his childhood inspirations.

"They were the players I looked up to as a kid," said Sampras, who recounted how he once hit some balls with Rod Laver when he was 11.

"I saw some tapes of Roy and Rod in Davis Cup matches and I've always admired their games."

Emerson said, however, that tennis now is quite different from his wooden-racket days. "It was unheard of years ago for a winner to be hit from 8 to 10 feet (3 metres) behind the baseline. Now you see it quite often," he said.

He also said he was impressed that Sampras had watched him on film. "I didn't think they had any film when I was playing," he added.

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