

Afghanistan want to be ICC member

KARACHI, Jan 20: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia want to promote cricket in the war-ravaged country and are trying to join the International Cricket Council...

Mirza Iqbal, a spokesman for the Pakistan Cricket Board, said two cricket officials had visited from Afghanistan...

Since seizing Kabul in 1996 the Taliban have brought most of Afghanistan under their ultra-orthodox interpretation of Islamic Sharia law...

In 1998, Afghani boxers were banned from participating in an international boxing tournament held in Karachi because they refused to trim their beards.

"We all pray that Afghans adopt not only the technical aspects of the game but the charisma that surrounds the cricketing field," said legendary batsman Hanif Mohammad.

Tyson vows clean bout

LONDON, Jan 20: Mike Tyson promised on Wednesday there would be no ear-biting, late blows or illegal clinches in his heavyweight bout against Briton Julius Francis next week, reports Reuters.

"I'm going to follow all the rules. I respect Mr Francis and I'm just looking forward to putting on a good show," said the controversial fighter who met reporters and fans in chaotic scenes at his central London hotel.

The 36-year-old Tyson was referring to his 64-year-old referee Roy Francis, who had warned earlier in the week he would suffer no nonsense on January 29 from either fighter.

"If he tries it on, I don't care whether it's the first minute or the last, I'll send him packing without hesitation," Francis was quoted as saying by Tyson.

Tyson, in Britain despite attempts to have him barred for his rape conviction, has a poor recent record after being fined and suspended for biting Evander Holyfield's ears in a world title fight in 1997.

He tried to snap the arm of South African Frans Botha in a clinch in his last fight but one, and his most recent outing against Orlin Norris was ruled a no-contest.

Tyson landed a late punch after the end of the first round and Norris injured his knee as he fell.

The former undisputed world champion, who lost his title in a huge 10th round upset to James 'Buster' Douglas in February 1990 in Tokyo, offered less respect to Julius Francis than his officiating namesake.

"Oh, he's in a lot of trouble," Tyson replied when asked whether he also respected Julius, who served time in prison 10 years ago for grievous bodily harm.

"I hear he's talking a lot of smack, what he's going to do, how he's been to prison. Yeah, okay. We're going to see, tough guy."

Lazio now wait for Barca's okay?

ROME, Jan 20: Italian giants Lazio are preparing to splash out a world record 100 billion lira (54 million dollars) for Barcelona's unsettled Brazilian star Rivaldo, the Corriere dello Sport reported Thursday, says AFP.

coach Louis Van Gaal degenerate over the course of the season. Van Gaal insists on playing the striker on the left flank,



RIVALDO

The Serie A club, recipients of the previous record when they sold Christian Vieri to Inter Milan for 90 billion lira (48.6 million dollars) last summer, already have a verbal agreement with the player, the Corriere claimed.

Rivaldo, the newly-crowned European footballer of the year, has agreed to join the Italian outfit in July for a five-year contract worth a total of 60 billion lira (32.4 million dollars), it said.

Now Lazio are waiting on the approval of the Catalan club, who have watched Rivaldo's relationship with Dutch team

while Rivaldo wants to be in the middle. His colossal transfer fee could be justified on two counts, according to the Corriere.

As a footballer, Rivaldo's CV includes 58 goals in 97 league matches in Brazil and 71 in 128 Liga matches with Deportivo La Coruna and Barcelona since arriving in Spain in 1996.

A member of Brazil's 1998 World Cup squad, he went on to win the Copa America last year. As a promotional figure, he would meanwhile be a precious asset for the Cirio food empire which Lazio's owner Sergio Cragnotti is seeking to build up in South America.

Negotiations for the 27-year-old began earlier this month and are expected to be concluded by mid-April, the paper said.

Van Gaal has reportedly given his blessing to the deal, but is asking Barcelona officials to sign Arsenal's Dutch left winger Marc Overmars as a tactical replacement.



Australian teenager Jelena Dokic (L) about to smash the ball while her American partner Jennifer Capriati looks on during their women's doubles engagement against Spanish pair of Rosa Andres and Conchita Martinez at the Australian Open yesterday. Dokic-Capriati duo won 6-2, 6-0.

Kafelnikov moves on

MELBOURNE, Jan 20: Defending champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov, who looked like the odd flutter, moved smoothly into the third round of the Australian Open on Thursday and pointed to Pete Sampras as vying for the title in 10 days, reports AFP.

The conditions here definitely favour the player who is relying on one shot and Sampras relies so much on his serve," said Kafelnikov after brushing aside Daniel Vacek of the Czech Republic 6-3, 6-0, 6-1.

"I don't see anyone besides Agassi who can break his serve." Sampras and Andre Agassi are scheduled to meet in the semifinals in the top half of the draw while Kafelnikov has seen five of the seven other seeds in his half crash out.

Kafelnikov said although he was favoured to reach the final

from the bottom half of the draw, there was a long way to go. "But I can tell you one thing, it definitely feels a lot better with each day," he added.

"I know I'm getting slowly to the shape that I would like to have." Kafelnikov was the only survivor from last year's semifinals.

Tenth seed Tommy Haas of Germany was knocked out by Moroccan Younes El Aynaoui while Ecuador's Nicolas Lapentti, seeded seven, retired from his second round match against Frenchman Arnaud Clement suffering the effects of a virus.

Losing finalist Thomas Enqvist of Sweden was beaten by Australian Richard Fromberg in the first round.

Lleyton Hewitt's amazing winning streak extended to new heights in a straight sets humiliation of high-ranking

Spaniard Alex Corretja. The perpetually pumped-up 18-year-old Australian routed the former French Open finalist 6-0, 6-0, 6-1 to storm into the third round and chase his 13th consecutive match victory against Romanian Adrian Panu.

"I'm seeing the ball like a football," said Hewitt. "I've won 12 on the trot. I suppose I should be seeing it like a football."

So comprehensive was Hewitt's blitz that the centre court crowd gave a Bronx cheer when the hapless Corretja won his first and only game to avoid going through without winning a game.

German fourth seed Nicolas Kiefer beat compatriot Tomas Behrend 7-6, 6-0, 6-2 to set up a third round meeting with Moroccan Karim Alami.

Sweden's 12th seed Magnus Norman swept to a straight sets win over Italian Gianluca Pozzi.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN NOTEBOOK

MELBOURNE, Jan 20 (AP): They're doubles partners with something in common, a teenager locked in off-court controversy and an older player who knows all about it.

Jelena Dokic and Jennifer Capriati teamed up Thursday to trounce Rosa Andres and Conchita Martinez Granados 6-2, 6-0 in the first round.

Capriati, 23, faltered as a teen tennis prodigy, got into trouble with the law and is now making a comeback. Dokic, 16, has drawn a 2,500 dollars fine for showing up late at a news conference and has disputed comments attributed to her by a newspaper.

After the doubles match, Dokic said she hadn't talked to Capriati about her troubles.

WHO'S NEXT The next batch of South African international tennis players is lagging behind because of the national economy, says the country's No 1 female player, Amanda Coetzer.

Cash-strapped companies are unable to sponsor major tournaments due to the low value of the Rand, she said. The result is a decrease in the talent pool and potential problems for future national teams.

The problems at home, however, couldn't account for the eight-seeded Coetzer's performance in a 6-1, 6-3 second-round loss to American Kristina Brandi.

"She's a very awkward opponent," said Coetzer. "But I should have stuck to my own game — my game in pretty good right now. I feel like I could walk out there right now and be competitive against anyone in the draw."

BUYOUT Australia's Bryanne Stewart celebrated her second-round win Thursday with a shopping spree. She's planning in advance how to spend her guaranteed prizemoney.

Despite a couple of questionable line calls, the unheralded 20-year-old stayed calm and fought back to outlast Swiss player Emmanuelle Gagliardi 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

"I'm very excited, it hasn't really settled in yet. I'm going to go shopping now," said Stewart, one of a breed of up-and-coming Australian players that includes Alicia Molik and Lleyton Hewitt.

"I've been going for my shots a lot more, even when I'm tired. That's the way like to play and it's paying off," said Stewart, who now meets No 13 seeded Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

"I'm looking forward to playing someone of that standard. I've got nothing to lose," Stewart said.

DOUBLES JEOPARDY Doubles isn't what it used to be. The only top-ranked male player competing in doubles as well as singles here is Yevgeny Kafelnikov. He's the No 2 seed in singles and, partnering Wyrne Ferreira, is the No 15 seed in doubles.

Tennis great Roy Emerson said men's doubles was becoming a non-event because the world's leading players have abandoned it. Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras stuck to the demanding task of singles.

It wasn't always that way. John McEnroe, for example, used to awe crowds with his touch and flair in both events. It's different with the women players. Martina Hingis and Lindsay Davenport are among top competitors who play doubles.

"Other people, like you guys, don't really pay attention to doubles." Anna Kournikova told reporters at a news conference Wednesday. She's teamed up with Barbara Schett in doubles.

Thorpe named young Aussie-of-the-year SYDNEY, Jan 20: World champion swimmer Ian Thorpe was named young Australian-of-the-year on Thursday both for his sporting excellence and charity work, reports AP.

Thorpe, 17, is the fourth swimmer after Jon Sieben (1984), Duncan Armstrong (1988) and Kieren Perkins (1994) to be given the title.

AUSSIE OPEN AT A GLANCE

MELBOURNE, Jan 20 (AP): Highlights of the day session Thursday on the fourth day of the eight million dollar (12.4 million Australian) Australian Open:

Weather: Cloudy early, clearing to a fine and sunny with a temperature of 82F (28 Celsius).

Attendance: 37,029. Results: Men's singles, No 2 Yevgeny Kafelnikov, No 4 Nicolas Kiefer, No 12 Magnus Norman all advanced. No. 7 Nicolas Lapentti and No 10 Tommy Haas both lost.

Results: Women's singles, No 3 Serena Williams, No 6 Barbara Schett, No 10 Conchita Martinez, No 12 Sandrine Testud, No 13 Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, No 16 Elena Likhovtseva all advanced. No 8 Amanda Coetzer lost.

Stat of the Day: Australian Lleyton Hewitt's crushing 6-0, 6-0, 6-1 defeat of Spain's Alex Corretja.

Quote of the Day: "Bad luck mate." Lleyton Hewitt after being asked what he said to the hapless Corretja after the match.

Asians advance

MELBOURNE, Jan 20: Still brimming with confidence after Thailand's charge at the Hopman Cup final, Tamarine Tanasugarn breezed into the third round of the Australian Open with a 7-5, 6-4 win Thursday over Canadian Jana Nedjedly, reports AP.

The No 1 Thai was 5-2 up in the first set before Nedjedly rallied to level at 5-5. But when it counted her serve was strong, helping Tanasugarn to win the first set and grab a decisive break in the ninth game of the second set.

Japan's Ai Sugiyama and her doubles partner Julie Halard-Decugis of France continued their winning run, advancing to the second round with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Nannie De Villiers and Jessica Steek of South Africa.

The tenth seeded combination won a warmup tournament in Sydney last week, dispensing with Martina Hingis and Mary Pierce 6-0, 6-3 in the final.

Another Japanese combination, however, was ousted in the first round with Shinobu Asagoe and Yuka Yoshida losing 6-1, 7-6, to Aisa Carlsson and Emilie Loit on an outside court.

Carlsson and Sugiyama are expected to meet Friday in a third-round singles clash.

Dokic denies draw rigging

MELBOURNE, Jan 20: Troubled Australian teenager Jelena Dokic has denied accusing tennis officials of arranging tournament draws to stall her career and demanded a newspaper release a transcript of its interview with her, reports Reuters.

Dokic told a media conference at the Australian Open today that the newspaper, which published the report on Wednesday had fabricated the entire story.

"I just didn't say those things," Dokic said. "I didn't even speak to him about what he wrote."

The outspoken Dokic said she had asked the Herald Sun to release a copy of the interview to prove her innocence and was disappointed the WTA Tour, the ruling body of women's tennis, and her own management team had not supported her.

"I just think they could have stepped behind me a bit more," Dokic said.

"I asked for the tape to come out to see the truth of what the conversation was about and I was the only one that sort of asked that."

Martina, Serena cruise

MELBOURNE, Jan 20: Defending women's champion Martina Hingis and Serena Williams, who beat her in last year's Open final, made startlingly different statements at the Australian Open here Thursday, reports AFP.



Swiss top seed Martina Hingis playing against Belgian Justine Henin at the Australian Open yesterday.

Hingis kept on course for a fourth straight title by dismissing Justine Henin 6-3, 6-3, on the 17-year-old Belgian's first trip to Australia, to set up a third round match with big-serving Australian Alicia Molik.

Williams beat another Australian Nicole Pratt 7-5, 6-1 and now plays Belgian Sabine Appelmans.

But while Hingis talked about tennis Williams, kitted out in a stunning black and red dress and red shoes, waxed lyrical about fashion.

The 17-year-old No. 3 seed, who says her favourite place to visit is a mirror, said: "We haven't seen anything this exciting in tennis for a while."

She did admit she could not win here unless she improved dramatically before she faced Hingis in a scheduled semifinal.

"If I want to stay for the whole fortnight I'm definitely going to have to improve my game," she added.

Hingis, unbeaten in Melbourne since the 1996 quarter-finals, was her usual confident self after her 62-minute romp.

"I'm pretty happy with the way things are going, I just have to keep my head up and keep going," she said.

But she thought Williams posed a real threat. "She's not at her best right now but she gets through her matches and that shows her quality," Hingis said.

Austrian sixth seed Barbara Schett beat Swiss wildcard Miroslava Vavrinec 6-4, 6-4 but 13th seed Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario was made to fight before overcoming American Lisa Raymond 6-1, 3-6, 6-3.

French 12th seed Sandrine Testud powered into the third round, hammering Mexican Angelica Gavaldon 6-1, 6-2.

Russia's Elena Likhovtseva, the 16th seed, beat American Meghann Shaughnessy 6-3, 7-5 and former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez, the 10th seed, ousted Olga Barabanschikova of Belarus in three sets.

However, eighth seed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa crumbled against Kristina Brandi of the United States, losing 6-1, 6-3.

Thailand's Martina Tanasugarn, a budding lawyer, swept past Canadian Jana Nedjedly 7-5, 6-4, to set up a third round clash with Testud, whom she upset at Wimbledon last year.

Goran ponders quitting

MELBOURNE, Jan 20: Three-time Wimbledon finalist Goran Ivanisevic may quit tennis at the end of the year unless he can find a way to pull himself out of the worst form slump of his career, the player said today, reports Reuters.

Speaking after his 7-6, 6-4, 6-2 loss to Spain's Francisco Clavet in the second round of the Australian Open, the lanky Croatian said he was finding it

hard to maintain his motivation. "I'm going to see after this year (about retiring) but I hope not," he said.

"I hope I can get over this... but there is a long time to go before I make any decision."

Ivanisevic, who finished runner-up at Wimbledon in 1992, 1994 and 1998 but has never won a Grand Slam title, said time was running out for him to achieve his lifelong ambition.

Once ranked as high as number two in the world, the 28-year-old finished 1999 ranked 62nd, his lowest end of year rating since he turned professional in 1988.

He failed to win a title in 1999 for the first time in a decade and showed few signs that he is ready to turn his game around as he caved in against Clavet, a player he had beaten on each of the five previous times they had met.

As reliable as ever on his own serve, reaching a top speed of 208kph, Ivanisevic was unusually tentative on return pushing and poking at the ball rather than hitting through it.

With the first set going to a tiebreak, he mis-hit five return on Clavet's second serve.

He was broken early in the second then twice lost his serve in the third when he had held game point. He never once got a break-point on Clavet's serve.

"It's okay to lose... but this is a different kind of thing," Ivanisevic said.

"It's tough to explain, but couldn't move... I was blocked I couldn't control my legs."

"I've played nearly 50 Grand Slams before but I looked lost on the court. I looked around and everything looked so big, so many people, it was like I've never seen people before."

"I'm running in the same place. I'm not going anywhere."

"I don't know what it's going to take. I don't know. Maybe should take some drugs."

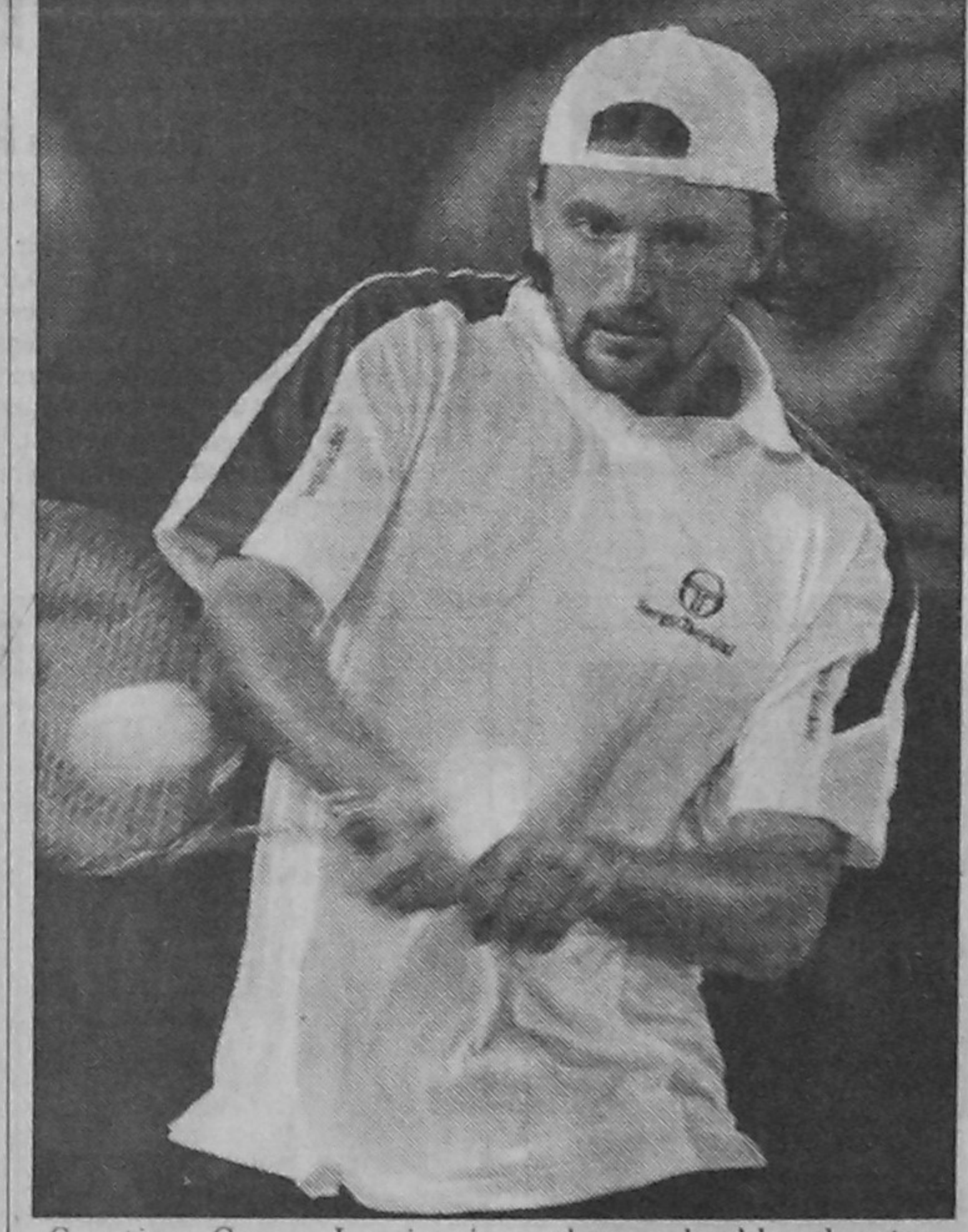
"He's a good player from the back but he's not the best serve in the game and I just couldn't return."

"That was just the worst match I've ever played in my life."

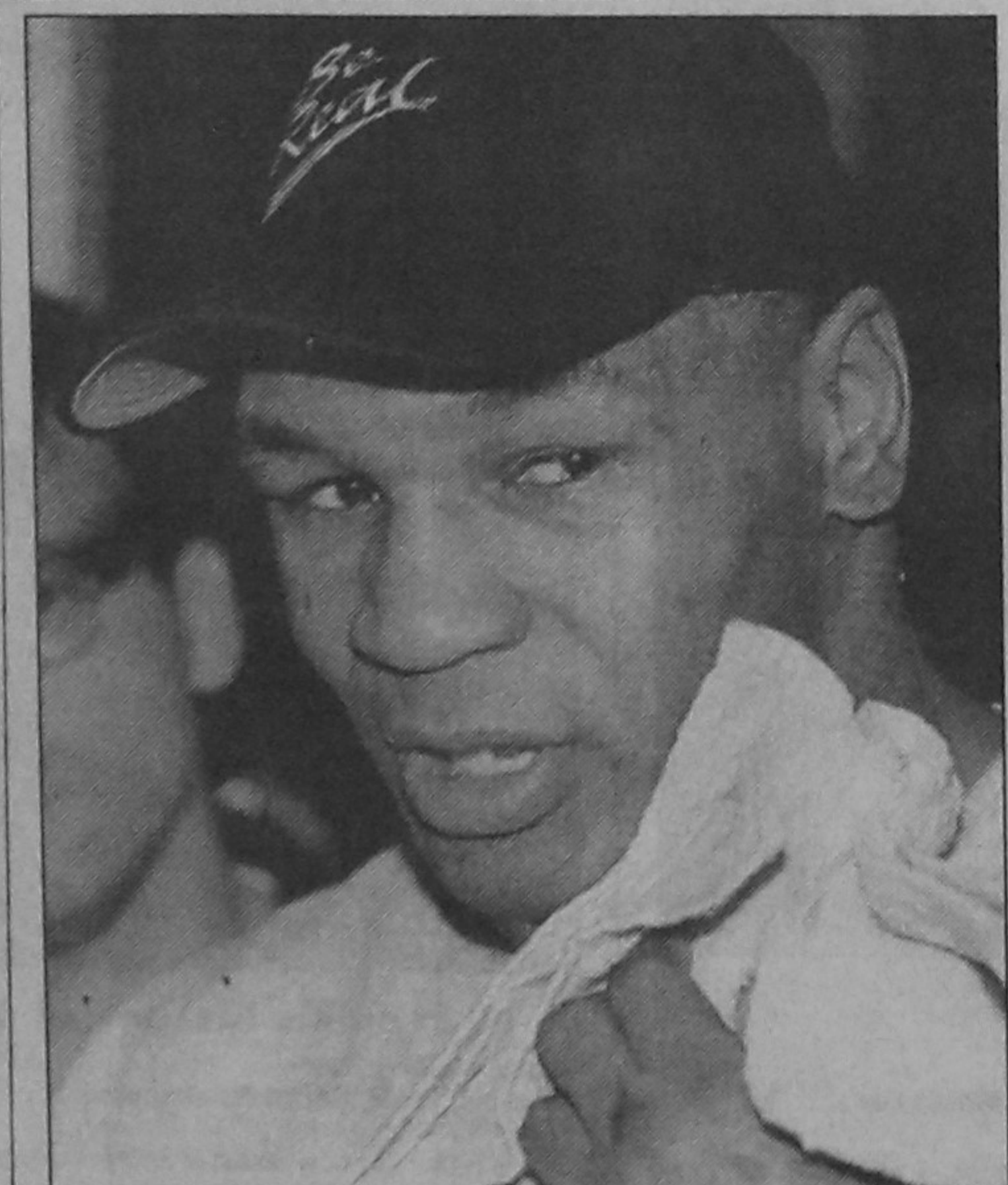
Despite his loss, Ivanisevic was still able to keep his sense of humour.

He said after his third round loss at last year's US Open that he was considering seeing a psychologist but said he had now dismissed that idea.

"Maybe I would become more crazy than I am now," he smiled.



Croatian Goran Ivanisevic makes a backhand return against Francisco Clavet of Spain in the second round of the Australian Open yesterday. Ivanisevic lost the match.



Former world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson during a press conference at the Grosvenor House hotel in London on January 19. Tyson will fight Julius Francis on January 29.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer and CRYPTOQUIP. Includes crossword clues and a grid.