

Sport

Milla fancies Cameroon's chances

ACCRA, Jan 30: Former Cameroon captain Roger Milla believes the side can make the African Nations Cup final, reports Reuters.

Current coach Pierre Lechantre was more conservative and reckoned his squad will head their opening round group at the expense of co-hosts Ghana.

Cameroon went top by beating Ivory Coast 3-0 in Accra on Friday to lead Ghana on goal difference.

With a seemingly easy match to come against Togo in Kumasi on Monday, Cameroon have every chance of remaining there.

"That is very much our intention," said Lechantre on Saturday. "We would prefer to play in the quarter-finals in Accra rather than Kumasi."

Ghana, also a point away from the last eight, meet winless Ivory Coast in Accra on Monday — a derby expected to be a tough assignment for the hosts.

Cameroon have undergone something of a renaissance at the Nations Cup finals after a decade of under-achievement in the tournament.

Milla, who helped Cameroon to victory in 1984 and 1988, said the current side had all the qualities of the generation of players who triumphed twice and also reached the World Cup finals in 1982 and 1990.

"It's been refreshing to see a Cameroon team play to its full potential at the Nations Cup for the first time in a long while," he said.

"We can go all the way to the final." Coach Lechantre was more reserved about his side's potential but said he was pleased with their enthusiasm, spirit and attitude.

"We have played some good quality football and if we continue what we are doing we'll be hard to beat."

"We have created a lot of scoring chances and been very strong in winning the ball in midfield. We should go on to win this group."

Norris' appeal denied

NEW YORK, Jan 30: A judge has denied a request by Orlin Norris, who wanted 2 million dollars in damages from Mike Tyson's purse from his bout against Julio Francis in England, reports AP.

Norris lost to Tyson on October 23 and contends he was assured a rematch if he said the late hit he took from Tyson during their bout was accidental.

Judge Barry Cozier noted Friday that "one of Norris' lawyers was in his dressing room when the alleged deal was done, yet nothing was put in writing. The judge said it appears unlikely Norris will win his case."

Tyson punched Norris after the first-round bell. Norris injured his knee when he hit the canvas and was unable to continue. The bout was declared a no-contest.

Norris says he reluctantly agreed to speak on Tyson's behalf because Shelly Finkel, the former heavyweight champion's boxing adviser, promised Norris an immediate rematch in return for the favour.

Norris' lawyer, Judd Burstein, also asked for a temporary restraining order to stop the Tyson-Francis bout in Manchester on Saturday night. But Cozier denied that, too.

Tyson's lawyer, Jerry Bernstein, said no deal exists between the two fighters.

"This is a ludicrous claim and we'll be filing a motion to dismiss," he said. "There's no written evidence at all, and that's what the judge relied on."

Ignorant AOC!

SYDNEY, Jan 30: A jailed Australian drugs offender was inadvertently named as one of 10,000 torchbearers to carry the Olympic flame around the country ahead of this year's Sydney Games, reports Reuters.

The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) said today that the nomination of 49-year-old former judo champion Warren Austin Richards was being withdrawn after it realised he was in maximum security in Sydney's Long Bay jail.

Richards is serving a 12-year sentence for conspiracy to import prohibited substances including heroin.

Richards was nominated for the torch relay honour as a reward for his participation in the 1976 Montreal Games. But on Friday the AOC recommended to the Sydney Games organising committee SOCOG that his place be officially withdrawn.

"By this morning we recommended to SOCOG that his offer of a torch relay spot be withdrawn and that's what will happen," AOC Secretary-General Craig McLatchey told reporters at a media conference.

Asked if the AOC was embarrassed, he said: "I think if we had the torch relay having to be re-routed through Long Bay jail, that may have been embarrassing. I don't find this embarrassing."

McLatchey said the nomination form and acceptance notification had been sent to Richards' previous home address, which was in the AOC computer system.

"We deal with thousands of athletes every week. There are some 1,400 Olympians now who are going to carry the torch and AOC doesn't think it will be maintaining personal, detailed dossiers on each Olympian," he said.

Prison authorities said that Richards' earliest release date was 2006, and there was "no way" he would be allowed temporary release to carry the torch.

Agassi amazes nobody



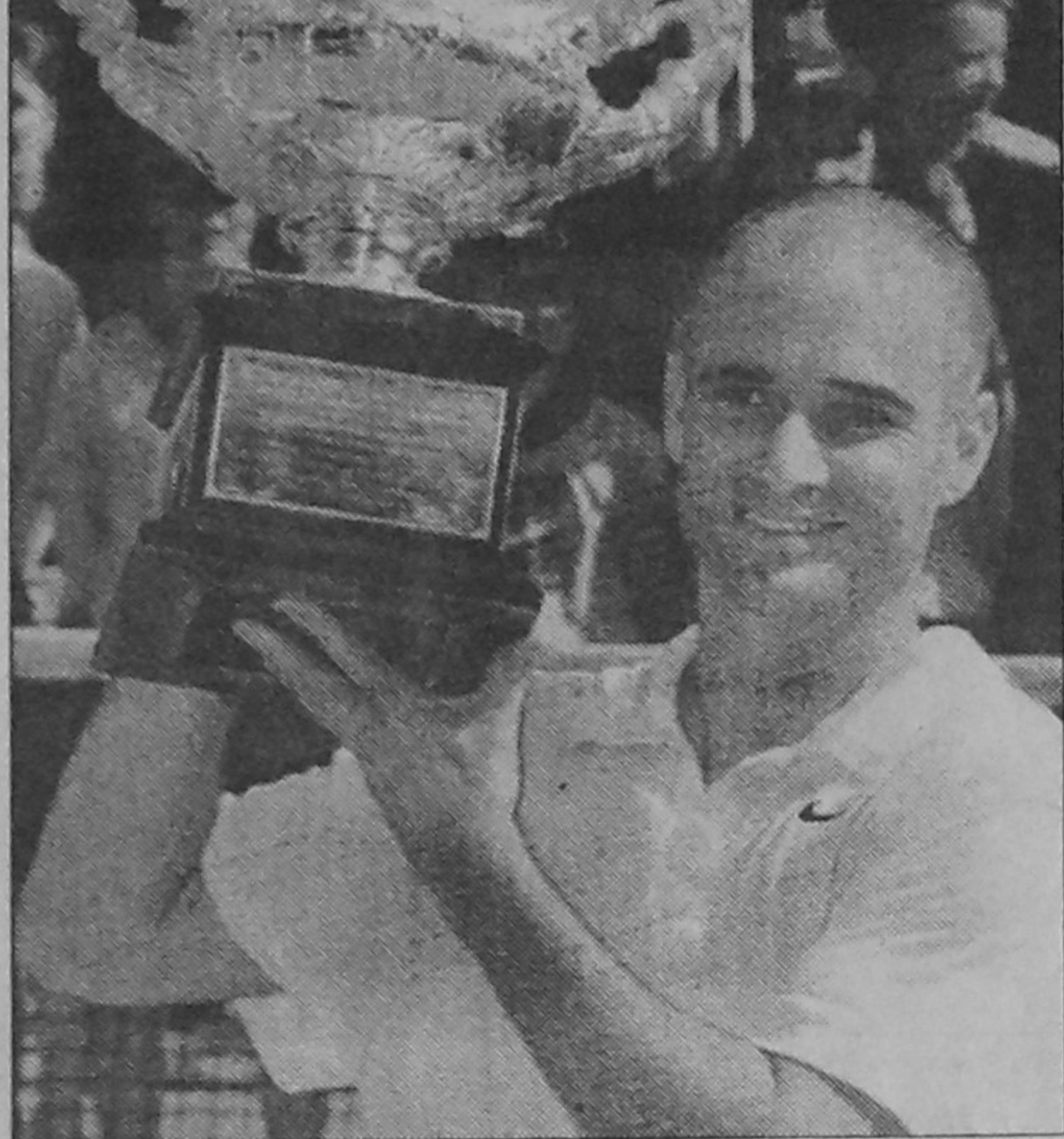
MELBOURNE, Jan 30 (AP): Better and better as time goes on, Andre Agassi claimed his second Australian Open and sixth Grand Slam title Sunday in an artistic and bruising victory over Yevgeny Kafelnikov.

Five of Agassi's most exquisite, feathery drop shots and dozens of powerful groundstrokes sapped the strength and spirit for the defending champion in a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 triumph.

At 29, Agassi left no doubt that he rules men's tennis. In less than a year, he has won the French, US and Australian Opens and finished runner-up at Wimbledon.

This time he put the exclamation point on his win with three aces at up to 197 kph (123 mph) in the last game.

"It's been crazy," Agassi said of his run to the top the past year after sinking as low as No 141 near the end of 1997. "It does take a lot out of you, but it



Top seed and world number one Andre Agassi proudly holds the Australian Open men's singles trophy at the Melbourne Park yesterday. The American beat Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov in the final.

also gives you a lot. This is what we play for. I was out there training on Christmas Eve. When you give yourself the best shot and you do it, that's what makes all your hard work worth it. There's no feeling like it."

"It feels to me like the same thing as winning the lottery for everyone else."

Agassi, the first player to reach four straight major finals since Rod Laver won the Grand Slam in 1969, pushed his career earnings to nearly 20 million US dollars with the 755,000 Australian dollars (485,000 US dollars) winner's cheque.

"I think he's hitting his stride right now," Agassi's coach, Brad Gilbert, said. "Ultimately he wants to keep improving. There are a lot more titles for him to win. He has three or four more good years left in him."

Agassi thanked Gilbert and his trainer, Gil Reyes, for telling him over and over that his best would be good enough all the time as long as he stayed in peak shape. And though Agassi didn't mention girlfriend Steffi Graf, who sat between them in the stands, he saluted her as they exchanged smiles.

This final proved, as everyone thought, anticlimactic to Agassi's brilliant and dramatic victory over Pete Sampras in the semifinals. There were too

Kafelnikov raced to a 4-0 lead in the opening set as Agassi struggled to find his range and inflict any damage on serve. But when Agassi broke back twice to make it 4-3, a sense of his ultimate triumph engulfed the match, even though he wound up losing the set. Agassi had, gotten a bead on Kafelnikov's serve, and it was just a matter of time before he started holding his own.

Yevgeny had to come out fast and he did," Agassi said. "I felt there was much more of a chance for me to run away with the match than for him to. But it quickly turned into a physical match and I liked that."

Agassi's time came quickly as he yielded only four points through his next four service games, then broke for a 5-4 lead with the help of two of the nine double-faults by Kafelnikov.

Agassi then came up with two stunning drop shots from the baseline that caught a flat-footed Kafelnikov by surprise and closed out the second set with a 187 kph (116 mph) serve that Kafelnikov netted.

"He's a good mover and plays five metres behind the baseline and takes a good clean swipe at the ball," Agassi said. "He's only looking to come in one time during a point. I thought if I could get him to come in a bit, it would make my power game more effective."

Though the match was even on the scoreboard, there was little doubt in Agassi's mind or in the thoughts of spectators that he was on his way to victory.

He breezed to a 4-0 lead, again slipping in the occasional drop among powerful groundstrokes, and won the set with ease.

"My legs started feeling heavy at the end of the third set," Kafelnikov said.

The only nervous moment from then on came as Kafelnikov was about to serve the fourth set when a man wearing a red mask and holding a video camera leaped to the court and took aim at the players. But guards rushed to grab him and pulled him away.

Agassi simply outlasted Kafelnikov in key rallies and didn't let him back in the match.

"I felt like somewhere in there, he got his second wind, but I felt like I had another gear to shift into," Agassi said.

Agassi's victory was his fourth straight over Kafelnikov and similar to the comeback he mounted from a 1-6 first-set loss in the US Open semifinals last September.

Kafelnikov said before this match that he was surprised by Agassi's resilience in the Open, the way he fought back from a set down. Kafelnikov promised he would have to adjust to that this time if in the same position, but Agassi never gave him a chance.

"It's amazing how he can recover from losing the first set and continue to raise his game," Kafelnikov said. "That's the aspect he improved the most."

Kafelnikov knew it



MELBOURNE, Jan 30 (AP): Yevgeny Kafelnikov said he didn't arrive with any realistic expectations about winning.

He talked about his expectations, or lack of them, for two weeks, saying he was not confident against either Andre Agassi or Pete Sampras — who squared off in the semis. Despite dropping just one set until the final, he preferred to talk up his golf game than show any interest in tennis.

Trap set, the defending champion ambushed Agassi at the beginning of the Australian Open final, racing to a 4-0 lead in the first set before the top-ranked American won a game against serve.

But the No 2 seeded Kafelnikov couldn't sustain it. And

after dictating from the baseline and dominating on serve early, he lost control of the match and slumped to his own predicament.

He lost on the big points, double faulting on break points and hitting the ball wide or into the net when he had chances to break back.

And after Agassi fought back to clinch his second Australian Open championship and his sixth career Grand Slam with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 triumph, Kafelnikov said he had to be philosophical about his performance.

"I did not expect to play that final match, but obviously I lost it and that's the only disappointment I have," he said. "I'm not disappointed with how I played. I think I fought hard, tried hard, but unfortunately I came up short."

"I felt like my legs started to feel a little bit heavy towards the end of the third set. I think Andre also realised that I was getting a bit tired and he raised his game to a different level."

Kafelnikov said he could match Agassi on tennis terms but had to improve his concentration on big points and his attitude in general.

Those were two good lessons that I've had at this Australian Open," he said. "I'm really going to try to avoid making" unforced errors on big points.

"That's really necessary for me to beat (Agassi). I can compete with him — we had a lot of great rallies from the baseline — but on the crucial points in crucial stages, three or four points made a huge difference."

The 25-year-old Russian served 14 aces and a total of 53 winners but he wasted those with 61 unforced errors, including 10 backhand errors in the fourth set.

He blamed his lack of physical preparation for slumping after a huge first set and praised Agassi for his spirited fight back.

"It's not the first time it's happened to me," he said. "It's the second time in the same situation where I'm winning in the first set, basically controlling the match, and then unable to play up to my standard as the match will progress."

He lost to Agassi in the semifinals of the US Open last year.

Kafelnikov said he plans to return to Australia in September for the Olympics and vowed to be back on form before he Australian Open next year.

Life ban on doper Edwards

LONDON, Jan 30: British shot putter Paul Edwards has been banned from athletics for life following a second doping offence, UK Athletics said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Edwards, 40, tested positive for a cocktail of performance-enhancing drugs in 1994 and was flown home early in disgrace from the Victoria Commonwealth Games.

Three years later Edwards, bronze medalist at the 1990 Commonwealth Games, tested positive for excessive amounts of testosterone.

Stubbs, Palmer pocket mixed doubles

MELBOURNE, Jan 30: Rennae Stubbs clinched her second doubles title of the 2000 Australian Open when she teamed with Jared Palmer on Sunday to win the mixed doubles final against Todd Woodbridge and Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, reports AP.

The 28-year-old Australian, who had never won a Grand Slam championship leading into the Melbourne Park tournament, won her second in three days with the 7-5, 7-6 (3) win over 1993 Australian Open mixed doubles champions Woodbridge and Sanchez-Vicario.

She combined with American Lisa Raymond to defeat Martina Hingis and Mary Pierce in the women's doubles final on Friday.

Palmer, who won the 1995 Australian Open men's doubles title with Richey Reneberg, closed out on the first match point when Woodbridge put a forehand into the net.

The opening set went with serve until 5-5 when Palmer hit a return winner at 30-40 to break Sanchez-Vicario and take a 6-5 lead.

Woodbridge of Australia and Sanchez-Vicario of Spain had combined to win Grand Slam mixed doubles titles at Roland Garros in 1992 and at Melbourne Park in '93.

Duck intruder!

MELBOURNE, Jan 30 (Reuters): A black-clad intruder impersonating a duck ran on to court during the Australian Open men's final today and started shouting: "Quack, quack!"

The man took to the Melbourne Park centre court as defending champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov was trailing world number one Andre Agassi two sets to one and preparing to serve to open the fourth set.

The man, wearing a yellow head-dress or cap and a red bill around his mouth, ran out from a tunnel at Kafelnikov's end of the court and began to film the crowd and players with a video camera.

Security men rushed on to the court but the man evaded, the first guard to reach him by jumping smartly over the net.

He gave up without a struggle and was bundled off court before the match resumed.

Lidia's third in a row

OSAKA, Jan 30: Lidia Simon of Romania pulled ahead in the last 500 metres and won the Osaka Women's Marathon on Sunday, beating Harumi Hiroyama of Japan by two seconds, reports AP.

The 26-year-old Simon finished the 42.195-kilometre (26-mile, 385-yard) race in a meet record of two hours, 22 minutes, 54 seconds. She broke the previous time of 2:23:24 she set last year.

Hiroyama placed second in 2:22:56, followed by Esther Wanjiru of Kenya in 2:23:31, Elfenesh Alemu of Ethiopia in 2:24:47 and Kayoko Obata of Japan in 2:25:14.

Hiroyama took the lead from Simon and Wanjiru after 35 kilometres (21 miles), but Simon caught up with Hiroyama in the last 500 metres and sped ahead.

"I used all my energy in the last spur," said Simon. "A total of 322 runners, including eight foreigners, competed in rainy weather. The temperature was 8 degrees Celsius (46 degrees Fahrenheit)."

Violetta Kriza of Poland and Luminita Talpas of Romania withdrew from the race around the mid-way point.

Norwood retains WBA title

FUKUOKA, Japan, Jan 30: American Freddy Norwood defended his WBA featherweight title Sunday by knocking out Takashi Koshimoto of Japan in the ninth round at Fukuoka Kokusai Centre, reports AP.

Norwood, who improved to 37-0-1 with 22 knockouts, stopped the WBA's No 14 contender with a combination of left and right punches followed by three left-hook haymakers with one more minute to go in the ninth of a scheduled 12-round fight.

In a match-up of southpaws, Norwood was in command from the start with effective jabs and powerful left hooks.

"I feel okay. And I'm glad the young man got up and he's okay. That was my main concern. The 29-year-old native of St. Louis said of the challenger, who remained on the canvas for a while before his trainer helped him up.

"My attitude? It's to be the undisputed featherweight champion of the world. I want to fight the Princess very, very bad, because that's exactly what he is — he's a princess to me," said Norwood in reference to Prince Naseem Hamed of Britain, the flamboyant, power-punching WBO 126-pound champion.

Hamed now is the double world champion after having won by unanimous decision over WBC titleholder Cesar Soto from Mexico in their unification match in Detroit in October.

"He's not a prince. He runs from me, he dodges me. I'm the best fighter, peaked, best fighter at 126. Can't nobody in the world beat Freddy Norwood with a 126," he declared.



Hungarian Aniko Kapros shows off the trophy for the girls' singles champion of the Australian Open. Kapros defeated Maria Jose Martinez of Spain 6-2, 3-6, 6-2 in the final at the Melbourne Park yesterday.

Lindsay's eyes on French



MELBOURNE, Jan 30 (Reuters): Look out French Open and look out Olympics. Australian Open champion Lindsay Davenport is on the charge.

The American slammed the hot favourite Martina Hingis 6-1, 7-5 in the Australian Open final on Saturday to extend an amazing run of success against the world number one.

Davenport has won her past four matches against Hingis in straight sets — a record that no other player in women's tennis can boast — and has pushed her career advantage to 10-7. Her latest success added the Australian title to a trophy cabinet that already includes the 1993 Wimbledon title and the 1998 US Open, all won without dropping a set.

New Davenports wants the French Open, the one Grand Slam title to elude her in what has grown to be an impressive record for a player whose career has coincided with the likes of Hingis, Monica Seles and Steffi Graf.

"We play for Grand Slam titles," said world number two Davenport, adding that she couldn't care less about being number one.

"To think I've got three different ones... I've only got one more to go," she said. "I never

thought I would be in a position to win all four majors."

The 23-year-old said she had always thought the Australian Open would be her first Grand Slam because Melbourne Park's Rebound Ace hardcourts suited her power game.

The slow Roland Garros clay presents a tougher challenge, allowing opponents to draw her into rallies to nullify the power game that worked to such devastating effect against Hingis.

"Clay is just a little tougher for me," said Davenport, whose best result in Paris was in 1998 when she reached the semifinals.

"What a challenge that's going to be." Davenport already has a game plan for the French Open and will travel to France a week earlier than in past years to spend the week before the tournament practising in Paris.

The Californian beat Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in Atlanta to win the 1996 Olympic gold medal, an achievement she still rates as the pinnacle of her career.

Davenport has a golden gleam in her eye again with the Sydney 2000 Olympics looming in September.

The Olympics is my most amazing moment in tennis. It's something above even a Grand Slam," Davenport said. "I've been counting the days."

AUSTRALIAN OPEN NOTEBOOK

MELBOURNE, Jan 30 (AP): Lindsay Davenport celebrated her Australian Open win with a gondola ride.

After her 6-1, 7-5 disposal of Martina Hingis on Saturday, Davenport changed into a more elegant outfit and boarded the boat with her trophy for a photo shoot on the Yarra River, which runs through Melbourne.

Fellow Australian Jim Courier jumped into the Yarra after winning the Australian Open in 1992 and 1993.

HINGIS DEFEAT Australian player Rennae Stubbs panned Martina Hingis for not giving her enough credit in her women's doubles final win over the No 1 player.

Stubbs was more positive about Hingis' Centre Court speech after she failed to defend her Australian Open singles crown against Lindsay Davenport. Hingis praised Davenport.

"I thought her speech was pretty good out there. She is always gracious to Lindsay. They have a good professional relationship," Stubbs said Sunday after winning the mixed doubles final with American Jared Palmer.

ON THE MEND Former No 1 Patrick Rafter is in Bermuda, hitting balls so he can be ready for a tournament in Delray Beach, Florida, at the end of February.

Rafter, who sat out the Australian Open to nurture his shoulder back to full strength

after surgery in October, said he won't try to rush his return to match play.

"I'm confident that when we crank up the workload, all of the pain in the shoulder will be gone," he wrote in a syndicated newspaper column.

There is still a bit of pain with the slice backhand and the volley and that is a worry," he said. "It's a matter of ensuring the muscles in that area are stronger and more flexible."

PAINFUL DELIVERY Ellis Ferreira says the "mental anguish" of playing to 18-16 in the fifth and deciding set of the men's doubles final was "like giving birth."

Although, the 29-year-old South African, who partnered American veteran Rick Leach to a grueling five-set victory over Andrew Kratzmann of Australia and Wayne Black of Zimbabwe, later scaled down his description to "pure torture."

A father of one, Ferreira had two chances to win the match on Kratzmann's second serve but the Australian survived on both occasions. Kratzmann saved three match points before skewing a backhand wide on the fourth match point.

It was Ferreira's first Grand Slam title and Leach's fifth.

TIEBREAKER Jim Van Allen saw Rick Leach's father play and then decided it was time to change the rules of tennis.

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

CRYPTOQUIP. A cryptogram puzzle with a grid and a key for deciphering the message.



Russia's Yevgeny Kafelnikov poses with the runner-up trophy of the Australian Open yesterday.