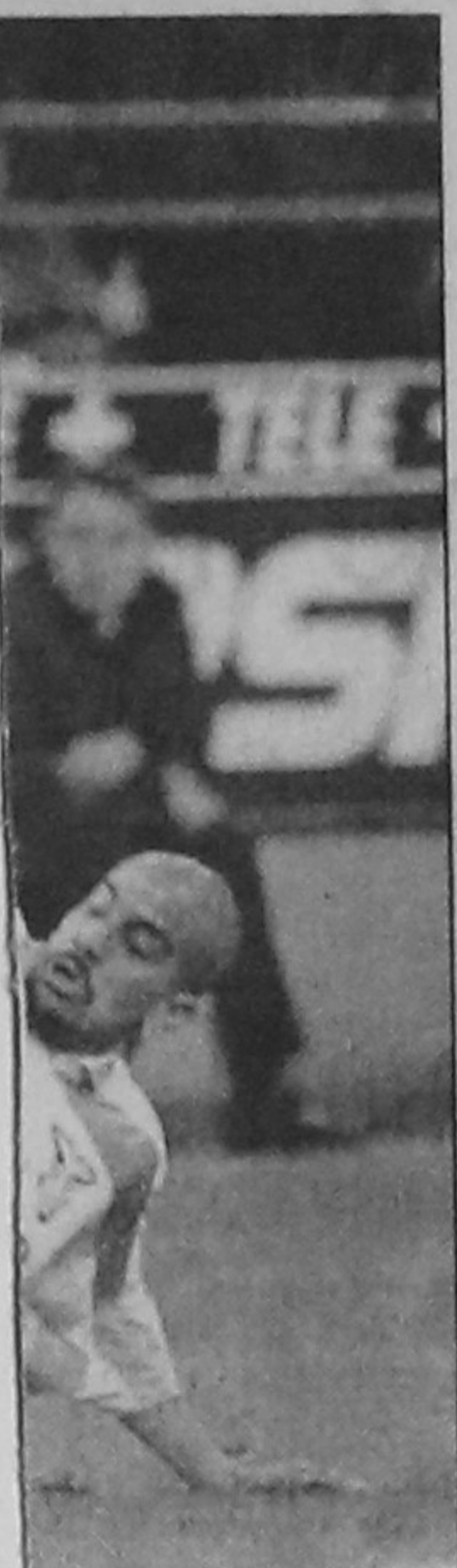


Sport



AC Milan's Croatia star Rivaldo. — Internet photo

azio

Completed his hat-trick in a range finish in the after good work from Juan Esnaider. Milan stay fifth after in a match which the dismissal of Piender Daniele Dalli

77th minute. took the lead in the through Blanc's since his move to Italy pulled level in the when Delli Carri a corner.

ari then saw red and minutes later Blanc re's lead with a header Ivano Recoba. Christian Vieri con- ter's win with the two minutes from

suffered their seventh out a win and had gio sent off for the se since New Year as ended a 3-1 lead to lowly Verona. boosted their hopes ing again for the with an emphatic 5-1 Bari, four of their ing in a superb first mance.

pe Signori gave first-half lead at a trademark free- edge of the penalty area but Lecce replied through Cristiano Lucarelli's 12th goal of the season.

Ronaldo, Romario friends again!

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 23: After a year and a half of silence the two Brazilian football giants Ronaldo and Romario are back on talking terms again, the local press reported here Monday, reports AFP.

The pair, who fell out at the 1998 World Cup finals in Paris and have not uttered one word to each other since, were reconciled at a birthday party here on Saturday night.

A rift developed between the players when Romario was upset at Inter Milan's Ronaldo for not supporting him when then Brazilian coach Mario Zagallo dropped him on the eve of the World Cup.

Romario was suffering from a thigh injury but claimed he would be fit in time for the finals yet his assurances fell on deaf ears.

Put out Romario then wasted no opportunity to criticise Ronaldo's performance in the finals in his role as a guest television commentator.

But all that was forgotten at Saturday's orchestrated get-together when Romario approached his countryman and said: "Come back to Brazil and play at Vasco (De Gama) with me. You'll see you're going to become the best in the world."

Ronaldo, a committed fan of Rio De Janeiro club Flamengo, retorted: "No, you'll see, it's me who's going to bring you to Flamengo."

The idea to get the players to make up came from Ronaldo's advisors Reinaldo Pitta and Alexandre Martins.

Ronaldo on Monday started a gruelling course of treatment on his right knee, operated on in Paris last month, at Tereopolis, 80 kilometres from Rio.

He is due to remain at the centre until March 5 under, the care of his physiotherapist, Nilton Petrone and Rodrigo Paiva and from Friday Pietro Volpi, Internazionale's team doctor.

Ronaldo is then due to return to Paris for one last check up before resuming his playing career.

Ronaldinho not for sale

BRASILIA, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Leeds United have offered Brazilian club Gremio dollars 81 million for striker Ronaldinho, president Jose Alberto Guerreiro told a Sunday newspaper.

A Leeds spokesman later denied the story, saying "it hadn't even been considered".

Guerreiro said his team in Rio Grande do Sul state would not sell the 19-year-old striker for any price.

"It makes no difference if they offer dollars 5 million or dollars 100 million. Gremio are not interested in selling the player."

Guerreiro was quoted as saying in Folha de São Paulo on Sunday. Folha claimed that Barcelona last week offered dollars 71 million for Ronaldinho. The paper also quoted the striker's mother, Miquelina Assis, saying she had asked Guerreiro not to send her son overseas.

"I don't want him to be without my care just yet," she said. She added her family were living comfortably on Ronaldinho's monthly salary of 50,000 reais (dollars 28,105).

Ronaldinho rose to international recognition last year when he helped Brazil win the Copa America.

After the event, Real Madrid reportedly offered Gremio dollars 27 million for the player.

Benitez's future in doubt

BARCELONA, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Espanyol's Paraguayan striker Miguel Angel Benitez will be out of action for up to a year, his club said on Monday.

Benitez snapped ligaments in his right knee, and also fractured his leg, early in the match against Atletico Madrid on Sunday after a tackle by compatriot Celso Ayala. "It's tragic, we are good friends," Ayala said.

Espanyol said earlier on Monday the player would be out for the rest of the season but the diagnosis was worse after a further examination.

Espanyol club doctor Ramon Cugat also raised the possibility the Paraguayan star of the 1998 World Cup finals and 1999 Copa America might be forced to retire.

Cugat said Benitez was being checked for nerve damage around his right knee and the results would not be known for several days. However, he said if the findings were negative it could mean the end of Benitez's career as a professional.

His injury is a big blow to the Barcelona-based club in their fight to avoid relegation. Benitez, with the club for four seasons, is Espanyol's leading scorer this season with seven goals.

IGA Classic tennis

OKLAHOMA CITY, Feb 22: Sixth-seeded Lisa Raymond beat Zimbabwe's Cara Black 6-3, 6-7, 7-6 to advance to the second round of the 180,000 dollars IGA SuperThrift Classic, reports AP.

"I came out playing extremely well and then fell asleep for a few games," Raymond said Monday night. "I stopped coming to the net and being aggressive. The next thing you know she's coming back and we're in a 2-12-hour battle."

In the second round, Raymond, who is ranked 27th in the world, will face Corina Morariu, who beat Kristina Brandi 6-4, 4-6, 6-0 in the last match of the evening.



American Serena Williams (R) and opponent Denis Chladkova of the Czech Republic holding their champion's and runner-up's trophies respectively after the final of the Hanover Grand Prix on February 20. — AFP photo

Williams wins Hanover GP



HANOVER, Feb 22: Top-seeded Serena Williams showed off her formidable power Sunday at the Hanover Grand Prix by blowing away unseeded Czech player Denisa Chladkova in straight sets to capture her sixth career title, reports AP.

The US Open champion showed none of her recent rustiness in her third tournament following a long layoff. She needed just 46 minutes to close out the 6-1, 6-1 win at the 535,000 dollars event.

Williams' dominance spoiled the bid of Chladkova, ranked 56th, to become the lowest-ranked player in 18 years to capture a large tournament.

"I didn't have such a great day, but she played excellently," said Chladkova, whose only other final came at Knolshelst.

Williams hammered Chladkova's weaker second serve for

easy points from the opening game, gaining five breaks against the Czech player in the one-sided affair.

Her own serve was so dominating, she won many games at love as she added a 87,000 dollars check to her career earnings, which broke the 3 million dollars mark as she reached the final last week at Paris.

Her play against the nervous Chladkova was a switch from Saturday's semifinal against Amelie Mauresmo, the one seeded player she faced in the tournament. The Frenchwoman fought her for more than 2 1/2 hours over three sets as Williams struggled with her forehand, serve and periods where she muffed one easy shot after another.

But even in that match, she flashed her power on occasion.

"Serena's definitely hitting the ball harder than she did a year ago," said Mauresmo, the world's 14th-ranked player.

Williams became the eighth

different winner in as many women's tournaments this season.

The 18-year-old American had soared into the world Top 5 last year by capturing five titles, but had taken a break from October to January 17. Since coming back, she has reached the fourth round of the Australian Open and last week's final in Paris, where she lost to France's Nathalie Tauziat.

"There is a lot of incentive to win after last week — I'm definitely looking forward to it," said Williams before the match.

Before Chladkova's forehand sailed long to end the match, the crowd began clapping loudly for the Czech outsider at times, hoping the 21-year-old could still turn it into a competitive match.

Chladkova jumped from 134th to 57th last year and now has reached four semifinals to go along with her two lost finals.

Rusedski breezes thru'



LONDON, Feb 22: Britain's Greg Rusedski eased his way into the second round of the 800,000 dollar London Indoor Open ATP Tour here yesterday at the expense of Frenchman Arnaud Clement, reports AP.

It took Rusedski just 64 minutes to brush aside Clement 6-3, 6-4 at London Arena and, after his early-season injury problems, the 26-year-old is keen to make this his 10th ATP Tour career title.

Runner-up last year when the tournament was staged at Battersea, Canadian-born Rusedski put on a commanding performance in front of the noisy but barely half-full Arena.

"I'm feeling very well," he

said. "My tennis has improved. It needs a little work but I'm moving well around court."

"Hopefully, I can go one step further and win the tournament this week."

However, if the left-hander is to advance to the quarter-finals and beyond, it looks likely that he will have to conquer British rival Tim Henman.

The duo are scheduled to meet in the last eight but Rusedski refused to be drawn on the showdown. "He has two more matches to play. I have one," said the British number two.

Clement, 22, was beaten almost as much by his own temperament as by his opponent. He objected to a series of line calls, but Rusedski refused to be drawn into any mind games.

Based in Marseille, Clement is more at home on clay and the hard indoor surface did not suit his game.

Rusedski took charge early on, forcing his opponent to go for extravagant passing shots which the Briton was frequently able to put away at the net.

He only needed to break Clement's serve once in the first set, and with the score at 5-3 he followed up a second-serve ace with another wickedly spinning clean service winner before a deep volley and a wayward Clement forehand gave him the set.

Three consecutive breaks of serve opened the second set, handing Rusedski a 2-1 advantage, before he became the first to hold.

At 4-1 and 40-15 up on Clement's serve, the match looked all over. But the Frenchman valiantly fought back to hold before breaking again to bring himself within a game of Rusedski.

"I should have put the game away to make it 5-1," said Rusedski, who served 12 aces al-

together. "But I can't complain with 6-3, 6-4 after breaking my opponent three times in the second set."

"He's a good player and it's a good result. I'd have liked to come off court a little sooner than I did today, but I'm getting through my matches and bringing out my best tennis when I have to."

"I'm feeling quite healthy and I'm feeling quite good about myself."

Henman's first round opponent is Argentinian 21-year-old Mariano Zabaleta while wildcard Jamie Delgado of Britain takes on Swede Jonas Bjorkman.

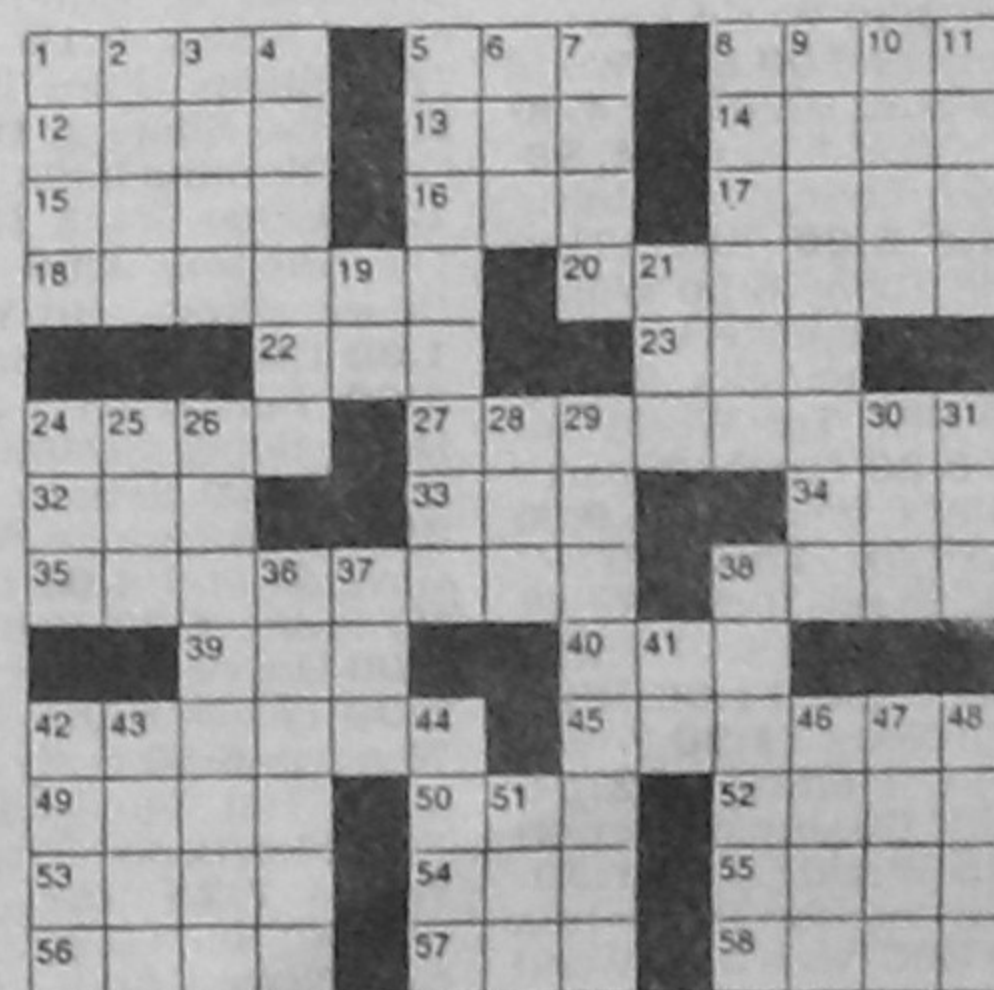
In the tournament's opener, Czech giant Daniel Vasek cruised past Bjorkman's compatriot Thomas Johansson 6-3, 6-2 in 66 minutes, while seventh seed Dominik Hrbaty beat Andrei Pavel 6-4, 6-3.

France's Fabrice Santoro then went on to beat Russian Marat Safin 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.

WTA rankings

MIAMI, Florida, Feb 22 (AFP): Latest WTA rankings on Monday:

Player	points
Hingis	5734
Davenport	5190
V Williams	3903
S Williams	3512
Tauziat	2550
Pierce	2487
Halard-Decugis	2025
Martinez	1981
Kournikova	1908
Testud	1771
Sanchez-Vicario	1768
Schett	1766
Mauresmo	1760
Seles	1713
Capriati	1556
Coetzer	1487
Likhotsava	1435
Huber	1458
Van-Rooost	1388
Rubin	1239



CRYPTOQUIP

A VIEYWX JQGYZ ETI
HBTH HBY DQVRYHAHAQL
TH ZQU EBQJE DTL

UYH ROYHHI OGXX
Yesterday's Cryptquip: THE OLD SPICE
MERCHANT FOREVER PRIDED HIMSELF AS A
SEASONED VETERAN.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: H equals T

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Primera Liga

Rivaldo, Barca turn on the heat



BARCELONA, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Rivaldo struck two stunning second-half goals in a 4-0 home victory for Barcelona against Valladolid that pushed the champions up to second place in the Spanish First Division on Sunday.

Barcelona are five points behind Deportivo Coruna after Real Zaragoza lost 2-1 at Real Sociedad and Real Madrid were grateful to come away from Valencia with a 1-1 draw.

Rivaldo, in virtuoso form throughout a sublime attacking display by Louis van Gaal's side, followed up a crashing over-head kick with a sweeping volley to round off the scoring after first-half goals from Ronald de Boer and Patrick Kluijert.

With 13 games left to play, Deportivo Coruna lead with 46 points following their 2-0 home win against Athletic Bilbao on Saturday. Barca are second on 41, with Zaragoza and Madrid both a point further back.

Real, playing their fourth game in eight days and missing strikers Raul Gonzalez and Fernando Morientes, fell behind on 35 minutes to a goal from Romanian international Adrian Ilie as Valencia dominated the first half.

Real, however, found reserves of strength in the second half to equalise as Jose Maria Gutierrez turned inside to

Stoichkov could join Chicago Fire

SOFIA, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Bulgaria's former striker Hristo Stoichkov has agreed to come out of retirement and join U.S. Chicago Fire this season if the club meets his financial conditions, local media said on Monday.

The former Barcelona forward, who quit international soccer last June, told weekly newspaper Football by telephone that he had resumed training in Spain where he lives with his family.

One of the player's pre-conditions was a monthly salary of dollars 241,600, the newspaper said, adding that the 34-year-old player had lost extra weight in a bid to get fit to play one season.

Stoichkov vowed he would not resume his playing career after his contract with Japan's Kashima Reysol expired last year.

minutes later after he saw his shot parried by Casazza and he pounced to knock the loose ball

Andriy Shevchenko but the

thread a

shot past goalkeeper Santiago Canizares.

Van Gaal had admitted before Sunday's game that his side had no more margin for error after two successive league

defeats. But even the perfectionist Dutch coach must have been satisfied with what was Barcelona's best display since their 4-2

win over Arsenal at Wembley in the Champions League.

With Ronald de Boer highly impressive in the playmaker's role in front of the back four, Barca launched wave after

wave of attacks. It was the Dutch midfielder who opened the scoring on 38 minutes as he shot home from outside the box after Valladolid's defence had twice failed to clear Winston Bogarde crosses.

The second arrived two minutes before halftime as striker



Barcelona's Dutch international Frank de Boer puts pressure on Valladolid's Japanese recruit Shoji Jo (No 25) during their Primera Liga fixture at Barcelona on February 20. — Internet photo