

Sport

PwC ratings
Cairns top
all-rounder

UNDATED, Apr 5: Although New Zealand were thrashed 3-0 by Australia in the Test series recently, one good news for the Kiwis is that Chris Cairns has climbed to the number one spot on the PricewaterhouseCoopers list for all-rounders.

Cairns has 457 points on the PwC index while South Africans Shaun Pollock and Jacques Kallis were following him with 422 and 410 points respectively. Pakistan's Wasim Akram is in the fourth place with 284 points.

Pollock is leading the list for bowlers with 905 points. Glenn McGrath, Allan Donald, Cully Ambrose and Muttiah Muralitharan are the other bowlers who found their names in the top five with 896, 877, 822 and 763 points respectively.

Brett Lee, Australia's newest bowling sensation, has soared to sixth in the ratings. His rapid climb comes after taking 31 wickets in just five Test matches at an average of just over 16 runs per wicket. He has 735 points. West Indies record-breaking first bowler Courtney Walsh is in the eighth spot with 714 points. He is just behind Anil Kumble, who has 722 points. Damien Fleming is ninth with 699 and Wasim Akram seals the top-ten with 690 points.

Source: Internet

Rajshahi cricket

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Apr 5: Rajshahi Primary Sports Training Centre defeated Masjid Mission Academy by 144 runs in the second Siraj Memorial Under-14 Kishore Cricket tournament match played at Rajshahi Medical College main hostel playground today.

Winning the toss, Masjid Mission invited the winners to bat first who collected 177 runs for seven wickets in the stipulated 30 overs. Sajib made the highest 46 followed by 31 not out from Purjit and 19 from Jonny. Abir and Tamir bagged three and two wickets respectively.

In reply, Masjid Mission were all out collecting only 33 runs in 15.4 overs. Nahian bagged three wickets. Earlier, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner and president of Rajshahi Metropolitan Sports Association Khondokar Shaheb Ali formally inaugurated the tournament.

BIR SRESHTHA CRICKET
Pioneer Cricket Club defeated Alinagar Janakalyan Sangha in the Bir Sreshtha Shaheed Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir First Division Cricket League match played at Chapinawabganj Stadium yesterday.

Winning the toss, Pioneer batted first and made 138 runs for all in 38.5 overs. In reply, Alinagar collected 111 runs in 27.2 overs losing all the wickets.

Sachin says no
to Mumbai

MUMBAI, Apr 5 (Internet report): Former Indian captain Sachin Tendulkar has requested the Mumbai Cricket Association to relieve him of the captaincy of the state side. This was announced by Mumbai Cricket Association joint secretary Ratnakar Shetty in Mumbai on Tuesday.

Tendulkar had earlier been named captain for the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Tamil Nadu to be played from April 11 to 15 at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

Tendulkar will now be replaced by Samir Dige as captain. Shetty said that "Tendulkar felt since Dige had led the side for the entire season, it would be better if he continues to do so. Besides, he reasoned that the new boys in the side would be more comfortable under Dige".

B'baria cricket

From Our Correspondent
BRAHMANBARIA, Apr 5: Chamok Boys Club became champions beating Dargamoholla Junior Club by 19 runs in the final of the Sadhinota Cup at the District Eidgah ground today.

Winning the toss, Chamok batted first and collected 158 runs losing seven wickets in stipulated 25 overs. Kamal was the top scorer with 58 runs. In reply, Dargamoholla managed 127 runs by losing all wickets in 13.3 overs.

Kamal of Chamok was declared man-of-the-match.

Too much cricket,
says Houghton

KINGSTON, Jamaica, Apr 5 (Internet report): Zimbabwe coach David Houghton believes too much cricket is being played around the world and players should be given more time to rest.

In general, too much cricket is being played, Zimbabwe, for example, are a small nation of cricketers and we pick our side from a small pool," he said.

"We've been playing non-stop since August and our first break will come in August this year for a month. From there we play non-stop to February."

Overall I think that it's just too much cricket," said the man who scored a century in Zimbabwe's inaugural Test match against India in 1992.

Houghton's team lost the two-Test series to the West Indies and were beaten in the first two matches of the triangular one-day series. But he said the experience so far on tour had been "tremendous".

Davis Cup quarterfinals

Australia, USA favourites



PARIS, Apr 5: Australia and the United States both have comfortable-looking home Davis Cup quarterfinals this week as they

home in on another final between the two greatest rivals in the competition's history, reports AFP.

The Australians, 27 times winners and the defending champions, play on the grass of Adelaide against a German side depleted through injury and dissonance.

Top-ranked German Nicolas Pietrangeli has opted out of team tennis as he chases personal goals, while number two Tommy Haas has withdrawn with a hip injury.

To make matters even worse for German captain Carl-Uwe Steeb, there are new injury doubts over his third-ranked player Rainer Schuttler who pulled up in training in Adelaide on Monday.

Australia have had their problems too, with their hero of last year Mark Philippoussis pulling out with a calf muscle injury.

But captain John Newcombe has a raft of talent to call on headed by the exciting teenager Lleyton Hewitt and two-time US Open winner Pat Rafter.

Rafter, on the injury comeback trail himself is likely to be limited to the doubles and possibly to the reverse singles if needed, according to Newcombe.

Wayne Arthurs, a serve and volleyer who is comfortable on grass as he showed when he reached the last 16 at Wimbledon last year as a qualifier, is expected to play in the first round of singles play.

Despite the odds on Australia, the cagey Newcombe is warning against complacency.

"When you have got nothing to lose you go for it and they could put in a blinder against you," he said.

"Our job is to make sure that we play to our maximum which should be good enough to win, but you never know," he added.

Over in Los Angeles, US rookie Davis Cup captain John McEnroe has the luxury of fielding the best two players in the world in Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras along with the world's top two doubles players in Jared Palmer and Alex O'Brien against the Czech Republic.

Sampras is coming off a morale-boosting four-set win over Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten in the final of the Miami Masters series event, the biggest of the year outside of the four Grand Slam events.

It was his first title of a year beset with injuries and talk that his years at the top were finally taking its toll on him.

"I hadn't played a match that tough in many, many months," said Sampras of the Kuerten final.

"To win a tournament of this

magnitude, with everyone playing, it's a Grand Slam feeling."

The Czechs are a steady if unspectacular squad spearheaded by Jiri Novak and Slava Dosedel.

On paper they look to have no chance against the Americans, but their team spirit showed through with a comfortable 4-1 home win over Tim Henman's Britain in the 1st round.

The other two ties should be closer but home advantage will give Spain the edge over Russia, the winners of which will play the US or the Czech Republic, and Brazil over Slovakia.

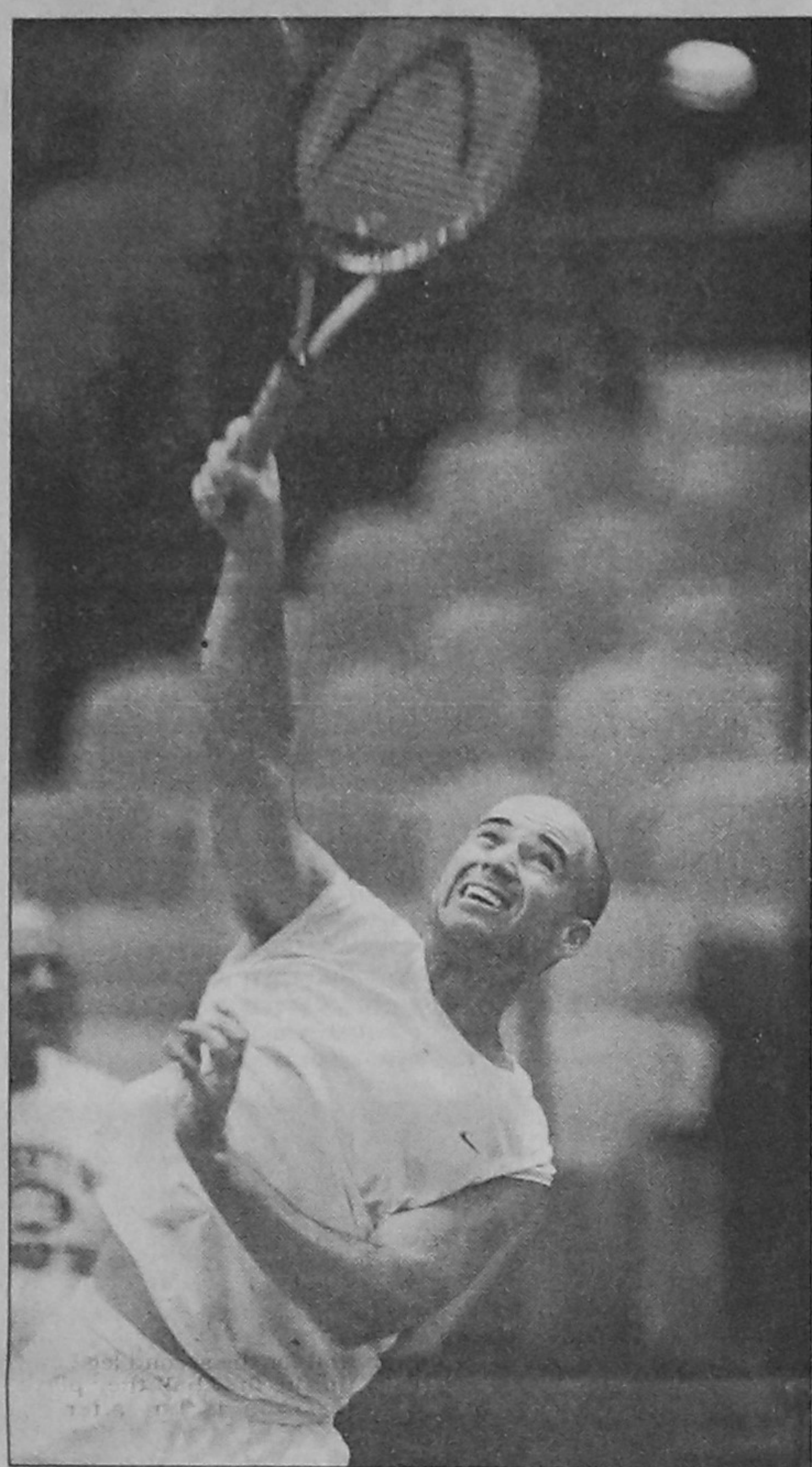
Spain, who have never even made the final, have chosen a slow claycourt to favour their star players Alex Corretja and Albert Costa, but former French

Open champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov is equally adept from the baseline on that surface.

The problem for the Russians is that their second singles player, Marat Safin, is unpredictable lurching from brilliant stroke-maker to huffy superstar from one match to the next. His form could be the key to the rubber.

Brazil now have a tried and trusted singles pairing in Kuerten, the Miami finalist and Fernando Meligeni who notched up an important win over Frenchman Cedric Pioline in the previous round.

But the Slovaks also have two good clay-courtiers in Dominik Hrbaty and Karol Kucera and the doubles could be the tie-breaker here.



US superstar Andre Agassi during a practice session at California on April 4 ahead of his team's Davis Cup matches against the Czech Republic.

— AFP photo

US-Czech Davis Cup qtr

Lakers inspire captains



LOS ANGELES, Apr 5: US Davis Cup captain John McEnroe hopes the championship banners dotting the rafters of the

Forum spark his dream team of Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi to dominate the Czech Republic the way the Los Angeles Lakers are dominating the National Basketball Association, reports AFP.

"We are going to try and be the Lakers this week," McEnroe said of the club that as of Tuesday had won 28 of their last 29 games.

Getting Agassi and Sampras together on the same team for the first time since 1995 has been a goal of McEnroe's. At the last minute Sampras pulled out of the first-round tie in Zimbababwe, which Agassi played in the week after capturing the Australian Open title.

"If these guys (Sampras and Agassi) play up to their capabilities, I expect they will win four out of four matches," said McEnroe, who filled out his squad with top doubles players Jared Palmer and Alex O'Brien. "With the crowd behind me, I am going in thinking we are going to win all of the matches."

But inspiration can work both ways, said Czech captain Jan Kukal.

Kukal, an avid basketball fan, has his own Laker connection, having organised exhibition games featuring Laker legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in Bratislava. He said the banners honoring the likes of Abdul-Jabbar and Magic Johnson could give his underdog side a boost as well when the quarterfinal tie begins here on Friday.

"The first day is a chance," said Kukal, explaining that despite their familiarity with Los Angeles, both Agassi and Sampras will be experiencing the Forum, former home of the Lakers, as a Davis Cup venue for the first time.

"It's not easy to play on new courts, you have to get used to them. And I don't think Davis Cup has ever been played in this arena," he said.

Not that Kukal was underestimating the task ahead: beating what he calls "probably the best team ever".

Czech players have taken on the best that US tennis has to offer before. In the 1992 quarterfinals, one of the previous seven ties that featured both

Agassi and Sampras, the former Czechoslovakia fell 3-2 to the United States.

The Czech Republic triumphed 3-2 in their last meeting with the states, the 1996 quarterfinals, when the Czech team was led by Petr Korda and the Americans by Todd Martin.

Germany injured
but defiant

ADELAIDE, Australia, Apr 5: Injury-hit Germany refused to concede defeat Wednesday in their Davis Cup quarterfinal with holders Australia here this weekend, reports AFP.

Germany captain Carl-Uwe Steeb, already without stay-away Nicolas Pietrangeli and injured Tommy Haas, said Wednesday they would have to see how Rainer Schuttler responded to treatment before making a decision on their lineup.

Schuttler suffered a calf muscle strain while warming up earlier in the week.

"He pulled a muscle in his right calf and couldn't practise the last two days," Steeb said. "We'll wait and see how he pulls up."

But Steeb was anything but defeatist. He said that while the Australians were very strong, his players were capable of causing an upset.

"For sure we are the underdogs and the Australians are clearly the favourites," Steeb said. "But there's always chances. Davis Cup always has surprises, it's different to a normal tournament."

"Our players, on a good day, they can beat any player... so if things are going well every match is open."

Michael Kohlmann said the team was in a good mood and having fun.

"I think we are all pretty pumped up right now... everything wants to give his best," he said.

Kohlmann was called in to replace Haas, who injured his hip a week ago. Haas led his country into the quarterfinals with a 4-1 win over the Netherlands. Kiefer refused to play Davis Cup for Germany.

If Schuttler cannot play then Steeb only has David Prinosil, Marc-Kevin Goellner and Kohlmann.

For this tie, Kukal has added Martin Damm to the players at his disposal, although he was expected to stick with the players that posted a 4-1 victory over Britain in Ostrava in January: Jiri Novak, Slava Dosedel and David Rikl.

Novak was the hero of the tie, winning all three of his matches.

His first career victory over Tim Henman, a 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 triumph in the reverse singles, gave the Czechs an unassailable 3-1 lead. He also defeated Jamie Delgado and teamed with David Rikl to beat Henman and Neil Broad in doubles.

"The US team is a big favourite," Novak admitted. "But we're going to try to win every match. We have nothing to lose, that's a good advantage for us. We'll see on the weekend."

Adding Damm, who reached the men's doubles final at the Ericsson Open in Miami, Florida, last weekend, will give Kukal some more options when the draw is made on Thursday.

"I feel very confident after being in the doubles final in Key Biscayne," said Damm, who teamed with Slovak Dominik Hrbaty but lost to Australians Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge in the final.

"I was prepared to have a holiday in Florida this week, but I changed my plans. Obviously I'm very happy. I'm ready to step in in singles and doubles."

The fact remains that none of the Czech players are in the top 30 in the ATP Tour's championships race, while Agassi tops the list and Sampras moved up five places to third by virtue of his Key Biscayne title.

On Monday Agassi practiced at the Forum and professed himself recovered from the twisted right ankle he suffered in Florida.

"I felt great," said Agassi. "Everything that I wanted to do I did, so it will be fine."

Sampras, who admitted to a bit of soreness after a tough, four-set victory over Gustavo Kuerten in the Miami Open final, pronounced himself fit on Tuesday.

"It was a good week," he said of his Florida campaign. "I had a day off yesterday to enjoy it, then I was back on the court."

"Obviously, I've played enough tennis. I'm in good shape. I just wanted to come out and get used to the conditions."

Marriage
not now

MOSCOW, Apr 5: The reported marriage plans of Pavel Bure and Anna Kournikova, two of Russia's hottest sports celebrities, have gone on ice, a Russian newspaper reported Wednesday, reports AP.

"A wedding isn't entering into my plans just yet," hockey star Bure was quoted as saying by the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda. "Today I love hockey more than anything else."

The pair sent the sports world a Twitter in February when Bure reportedly proposed to tennis star Kournikova at a restaurant in Florida where the two live. A photographer snapped the two cuddling at their table, and a 1 million dollar diamond ring was said to be involved.

The report was especially big in Russia, where even the most staid newspapers splashed it across their front pages. One said the event would be a marriage between Russia's "first bride" and "first groom," even though the two left their home-land long ago for the United States.

Kournikova, 18, is ranked 10th in the world but has yet to win a tournament on the WTA tour. Still, she has become one of the game's most popular players known for her widespread sex appeal.

Bure, nicknamed the Russian rocket, plays for the Florida Panthers. The 28-year-old is the National Hockey League's leading scorer with 57 goals.

India looking
for lost pride

SYDNEY, Apr 5: India hope to re-establish their Olympic credentials in a four-nation tournament that starts here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Coach V. Baskaran said Wednesday the tournament with Australia, South Africa and Germany in Sydney this week and Perth next week is the ideal chance to get the country back in the groove for the September Games.

The seedings for Sydney 2000 are due out by the end of the month and it is unlikely India will be in the top eight.

But Baskaran was confident India could prove a surprise package if they put in the necessary hard work.

"We're capable of finishing up there but we have a lot of hard work to do," he said.

He believed the Indian tradition of dribbling could still challenge the modern physical game played by Australia, Holland, Germany, Pakistan, South Korea and Spain.

But Baskaran said the biggest problem for India had been adapting to the constant rule changes.

"It's difficult to adjust to new rules in a big country like ours," he said.

"In a country like Holland everybody knows about it the next day."

Artificial pitches, the elimination of offside in 1996 and obstruction in 1998 quickened the game and brought a more powerful physical aspect to a supposedly non-contact sport.

And the modern obsession with computer and video analysis, improvements in physiology and the employment of sports psychologists have all left India, winner of an unprecedented eight Olympic men's hockey gold medals, behind.

India have not won a major tournament for 25 years and Baskaran admitted it was unlikely to change at the Sydney Olympics.

"But with a unified team we are capable of springing a surprise," he added.

One rule change that could help India was made at last year's Champions Trophy where unintentional ball contact with the feet went unpunished, denying the more defensive sides penalty corners that would have otherwise been awarded.

But Baskaran felt team motivation was essential.

"You have to be able to handle the pressure and the team that gets it done will be the team that succeeds," he said.

Clay court gives
Spain unusual
worries

MADRID, Apr 5: Spanish players are the clay court specialists but Alex Corretja is a worried man ahead of this weekend's Davis Cup quarterfinal with Russia, reports AFP.

Malaga is hosting a Cup tie for the first time and Corretja is far from familiar with the venue, and the clay surface after playing on hard courts in the early months of the year.

"We have to adapt quickly to the clay court (in Malaga) because we are coming into the match having not played on this surface for a long time," the Spanish number one said.

"I'm fit enough and, speaking personally, playing here will help my preparations for Indian Wells in a few weeks time, but the important thing is that this team gets through this match and reaches the semifinals."

Clay has proved to be the Spanish talisman over the years -- in Spain's 16 years in the World Group, every one of their 11 victories has come on clay.

Another factor which gives some comfort to Corretja is that the Spanish team is unchanged from that which thrashed Italy 4-1 in the last round.

Hussain hopes for the best



LONDON, Apr 5: Nasser Hussain said on Tuesday he is confident of a resolution to the England contract dispute -- but has refused to rule out a stand-off after 12 players were set a Thursday deadline for signing their six-month deals, reports AFP.

After weeks of negotiations between the England and Wales Cricket Board and players' representatives, the 12 selected to be centrally contracted for the first time were given a final draft at the Cheshire base they are using for fitness work ahead of the international season.

Both sides have agreed to compromises to the original contract, which was due to come into operation on April 1, and the players are now expected to seek advice from their respective agents before coming to a decision.

Hussain, however, refuses to rule out the possibility of the dispute continuing as the two sides haggle over the final clauses to a contract which will be identified as the blueprint for future deals.

"This is not a problem," he stressed. "It's just people making sure that things are done right and that when we sign this contract that people in the future after we're gone are also

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"It's not a selfish thing. We don't understand these things -- we're cricketers -- but, when you sign something in a contract

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