

Zimbabwe struggling

LONDON, May 6: Zimbabwe struggled here Friday as they slid to 107 for seven by tea against Kent at Canterbury, reports AFP.

Facing a massive deficit of 328, Zimbabwe were sent into a downward spiral for the second time in the match by debutant seamer David Masters.

Masters followed his four for 44 in the first innings with four for nine in nine overs, and wickets by spinners Min Patel and Darren Scott added to Zimbabwe's plight.

The only plus for Zimbabwe on a dire day was the return to form of key batsman Neil Johnson, who has suffered four ducks in his last six innings dating back to the recent West Indies tour.

Johnson drove his opening ball from Patel for three for his first runs of the tour, and rightly proceeded to play his shots, reaching a fluent 53 not out from 83 deliveries, including two on-side sixes off Scott.

Kent declared at 487 for eight, then Masters had Grant Flower caught behind on the stroke of lunch. Soon afterwards, Masters removed Murray Goodwin lbw playing across the line. Trevor Gripper was spun out by Patel, then Masters accounted for Guy Whittall and Stuart Carlisle.

Scott sent back Dirk Viljoen and Tendani Taibu helped by close catches from Rahul Dravid and Ed Smith but found Johnson a much tougher opponent.

Kent captain Matthew Fleming closed his first innings once Paul Nixon (54) had been bowled off his pads by Grant Flower for 53 from 138 balls.

Nixon and Fleming (38) added 74 in 15 overs with declaration clearly on their minds after the mastershow of India's Dravid yesterday.

But Dravid lasted just eight balls, falling 18 runs short of his fourth double century, and failing to add to his overnight 182.

Baumann's appeal denied

BERLIN, May 6: A German court has refused to allow former Olympic 5,000 metres champion Dieter Baumann to compete while waiting for officials to make a final decision on his doping case, reports Reuters.

Baumann, who faces a two-year ban for testing positive for nandrolone, was seeking permission to compete before the legal committee of the German Athletics Federation (DLV) reaches a final decision.

A spokesman for public prosecutors in Darmstadt on Friday confirmed a report in the German daily *Stuttgarter Zeitung* that the request had been rejected.

Baumann wanted to compete so he could make the qualifying standard for this year's Olympics, hoping he might then be able to go to Sydney if he was cleared by the DFB.

My last possibility to qualify for the Olympics has been taken away," said Baumann, announcing he would be giving a press conference on Monday.

His lawyer, Michael Lehner, said Baumann would appeal the court's decision but the prospect of the ruling being overturned seemed unlikely.

Baumann, 5,000 metres gold medalist at the 1992 Barcelona Games, was suspended last November after two random tests showed he had levels of the banned anabolic substance nandrolone 10 times over the accepted limit.

The German athlete, who has campaigned against doping and advocated tough sanctions against drug cheats, denied any wrongdoing.

He filed legal proceedings against unknown parties after nandrolone was found in his toothpaste, claiming the drug must have been injected maliciously.

Unstoppable Safin

PALMA, Spain, May 6: Inform Russian Marat Safin remained on course for his second successive tournament win as he moved through to the semifinals of the 500,000 dollar Mallorca Open here on Friday with a hardfought 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 over Spain's former world number one Carlos Moya, reports AFP.

The 20-year-old right-hander, who won his second career ATP title in Barcelona last Sunday, took two-and-a-quarter hours to seal his win over the stubborn 23-year-old, who in 1999 became the first Spaniard in 26 years to be listed at number one.

Safin, who stormed to prominence last year as he recorded his first career ATP title in Boston, sealed his win on his second match point after Moya, the 1998 French Open winner and a finalist here the same year, had saved the first in the third set tie-break.

The Russian, who rebounded from losing the first set to batter Moya with an almost perfect baseline game, will face unheralded Spaniard Galo Blanco in Saturday's semis after the 23-year-old overcame up and coming Argentine Juan Ignacio Chela, who eliminated mercurial Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov on Thursday, also in three sets 5-7, 6-3, 6-3.

The other semifinal pits Chela's compatriot Mariano Puerta against Swede Mikael Tillström. Puerta, the sixth seed, beat Spaniard Alberto Martin 6-4, 6-1 while on a wretched day for the home players Tillström beat another Spaniard Albert Portas 6-3, 6-2.

Imran says ICC biased



KARACHI, May 6: Pakistani cricket legend Imran Khan on Saturday hit out at officials of the International Cricket Council (ICC), saying they were biased against Pakistan, reports AFP.

"They should have asked the ICC chief executive David Richardson why he concealed facts about Australian players' confession of having contacts with bookies in 1994," Imran said, commenting on the governing body's London meeting this week.

"I don't know why the ICC has not taken the Australian Cricket Board to task for hiding facts. The ICC instead put pressure on Pakistan for its match-fixing report," Imran said.

The 47-year-old former Pakistan captain -- who now heads his own political party, Movement for Justice -- was referring to Australian players Shane Warne and Mark Waugh who confessed to accepting money from an Indian bookmaker for providing pitch and weather information during Sri Lanka's 1994 tour.

The Australian Cricket Board (ACB) imposed fines on the players without disclosing the facts until they were divulged in 1998.

Richardson knew those facts and had action been taken at that time the menace would not have spread like this," Imran said.

"Now most of their decisions are baseless and they would not be able to achieve anything," he said, adding that the formation of an investigative body "is the only positive decision."

During its two day meeting the ICC decided to set up a corruption investigative body and announced that anyone found to be involved in match-fixing would be banned for life.

Imran also criticised South African official Ali Bacher, managing director of the United Cricket Board South Africa, last month told "The Australian" newspaper that two World Cup matches had been fixed, including one between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

He also expressed suspicions about Pakistani umpire Javed Akhtar. Bacher later retracted, saying he never mentioned any country's or umpire's name.

"He should have been questioned for his irresponsible statement. He deserved expulsion from the ICC for throwing mud on a member country," he said.

"I don't know why Pakistan's representative took a lenient action on that," Imran said.

Imran said proper investigations into all match-fixing allegations were necessary.

"Now Kapil Dev's name is dragged in India but it should be first investigated properly," he said.

Imran recommended that any Pakistani player found involved in match-fixing should be banned for life.

"I have been telling the officials and I maintain that any player involved must be banned for life. This is the only way to save the future of the game," he said.

Imran denied newspaper reports he had met with the country's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf to offer advice on match-fixing reports.

"I have not met any officials but I have conveyed my stance to the chairman of the cricket board General Tauqir Zia," he said.

A match-fixing report by Lahore High Court Judge Malik Mohammad Qayyum is pending action in Pakistan.

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Qayyum report Tarrar asks for clarifications

KARACHI, May 6: Pakistani President Mohammad Rafiq Tarrar asked the national cricket board's chairman on Saturday to clarify certain points in a cricket match-fixing report based on a judicial inquiry, a senior official said, reports AFP.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman General Tauqir Zia had a half an hour meeting with the president and the match-fixing report also came under discussion, presidential spokesman Irfan Siddiqui told this news agency.

Tarrar, who is also patron of the PCB, is the final authority in deciding whether to act on the recommendations made by the Lahore High Court Judge Malik Mohammad Qayyum in his 176-page report into the scandal.

The report has not been made public.

"The president sought some clarifications on certain points in the report and asked General Zia to resubmit the same without any delay," the spokesman said after the meeting in Islamabad.

"I can't elaborate on clarifications sought and no time frame is given," he added.

Qayyum's report, prepared after a year long inquiry, has been pending action since it was delivered to the sports ministry in November last year.

There has been no official comment on reports that Qayyum has recommended a life ban on two players and fines against five others.

RTBU warns NSW govt

SYDNEY, May 6: Transport and other services would be disrupted during the Olympics unless the New South Wales government agreed to give workers a pay allowance, the State's Labour Council secretary Michael Costa said Friday, reports AFP.

One allowance claim lodged by the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) demanded a 300 dollar-a-week (180 US) attendance bonus and one week's additional leave for bus drivers and train signallers, guards, drivers, controllers and station staff to be taken within three years.

The Public Service Association has lodged another claim asking for an additional three dollar (1.8 US) an hour on behalf of 8,000 public service workers.

Public transport unions have already imposed bans on Olympic-related training and rostering over the dispute.

Costa said he had written to NSW Premier Bob Carr asking for urgent talks in the next fortnight.

He described the two bids as modest, saying they would cost the government a maximum of 20 million dollars (12 million US).

"We are not boosting salaries through this process... nobody's going to become wealthy over this," he told reporters.

He said he believed public servants needed to be compensated for working during the Olympics.

"The average worker under the arrangement... will probably get about 220 dollars (132 US) for the period of the Olympics," Costa said.

"These people have had their leave cancelled in many cases, they've had their rosters altered."

"It's certainly important in terms of a symbol of the recognition of the contribution they're making."

Unions across the state vowed to paralyse public transport and other services if the government failed to deliver on the allowance within 14 days.

The unions had also been involved in intensive talks with the government over two pay claims but had failed to reach an agreement.

Costa said the allowance claims would cover public sector workers such as police officers, who are providing Olympic-related services and have had their normal working conditions altered because of the Games.

Pay-per-view pulls Lewis down

NEW YORK, May 6: Britain's Lennox Lewis knocked out Michael Grant to keep his heavyweight title, but was flattened by pay-per-view numbers that show only 375,000 purchases of last Saturday's show-down here, reports AFP.

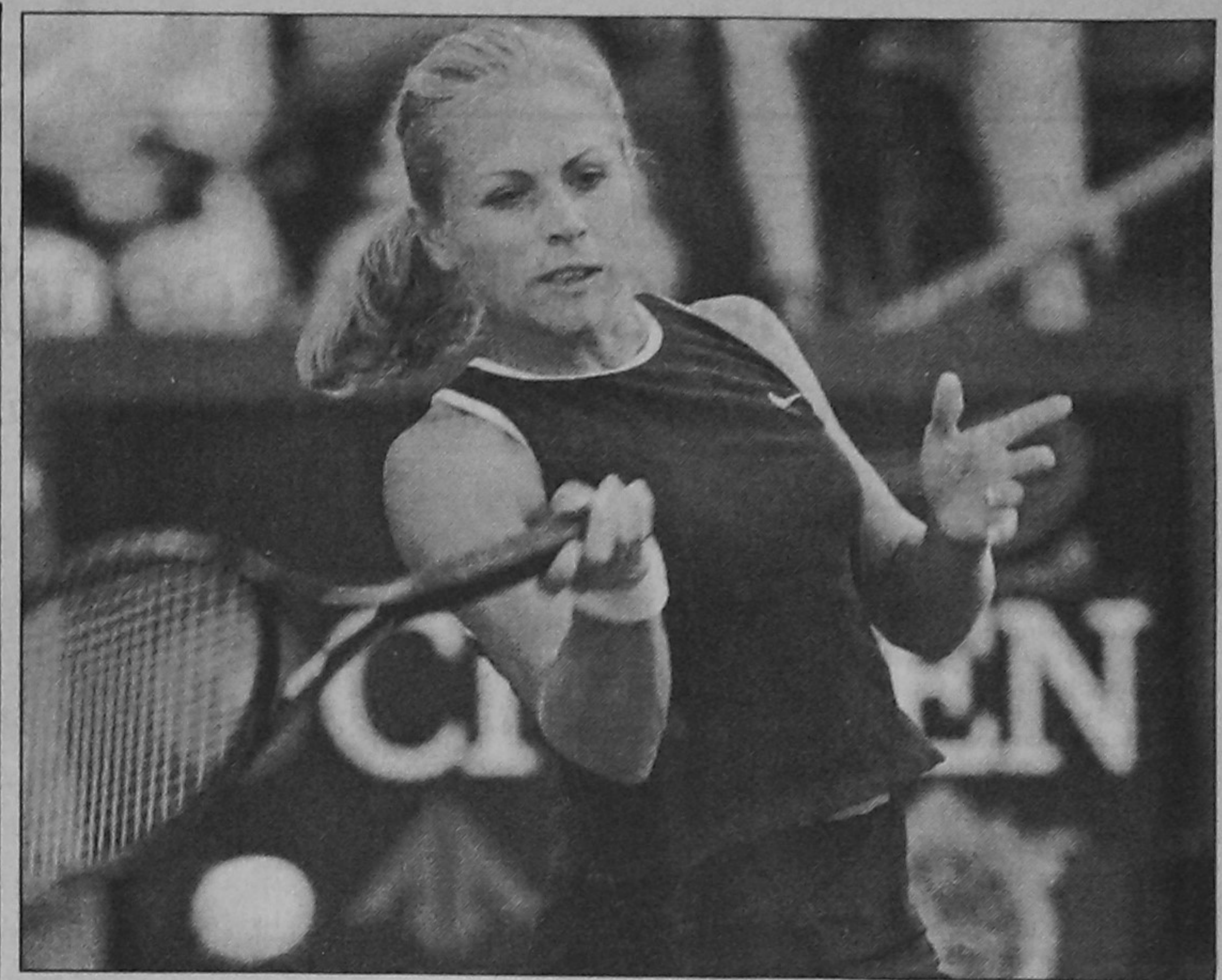
The figure is among the worst showings ever for a heavyweight world title boxing card, although TVKO's Ray Stal one called the total "about what we expected."

What the viewership numbers showed was that both Lewis and Grant lack the drawing power of such American heavyweights as Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield when it comes to the profitable telecast audience.

US homes could purchase the fight and three undercard matchups for just under 45 dollars.

Lewis' triumph over Holyfield last November led 850,000 pay-per-view purchases. Their first matchup, which ended here in a draw in March of last year, had 1.2 million purchases.

The Tyson-Holyfield bouts had the best purchase numbers, with 1.6 million buying their first encounter and a record 1.99 million watching the rematch in which Tyson bit Holyfield's ears.



South African Amanda Coetzer plays a forehand against American Venus Williams at the Batty Barclay Open in Hamburg on May 5.

Williams falls, Hingis flies

HAMBURG, Germany, May 6: Defending champion Venus Williams surrendered her title at Betty Barclay Cup on Friday when she was beaten 6-3, 6-4 by eighth seed Amanda Coetzer, reports AFP.

The South African now faces third seed Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, who gained a single break of serve in each set to defeat German wild card Andrea Glass 6-3, 6-3.

Top seed Martina Hingis also struggled before overcoming Anna Kournikova 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 to advance to the semifinals. Hingis next plays seventh seeded Anke Huber, after the German surrendered a 6-3 lead in the first set tie-break before upsetting third seeded Spaniard Conchita Martinez 6-7, 7-6, 6-2.

Coetzer at first found little resistance from second seeded Williams, who was making her comeback this week after an injury break of nearly six months.

The American often overhit the ball, and after exchanging service breaks in the first three games Coetzer took the opening set when Williams double-faulted.

Coetzer played a fine defensive match against the hard-hitting but erratic Williams, but

it was two more double-faults that helped her break at love for a 2-0 lead in the second set.

Another break to love gave Coetzer a 4-0 lead, and the contest was all but over. Williams though finally found the accuracy she needed and staged a fightback, breaking when Coetzer served for victory at 5-3 but then dropping her own serve.

"She played well and I didn't play my best tennis, and that's the story of the match," said a disappointed Williams. "My shots weren't going in. I felt that my timing was off, because all the other times I've played Amanda that's the way I hit, but today they weren't going in. It wasn't a lack of match play. It was a lack of good play."

Kournikova, whose only win against Hingis came on clay in Berlin two years ago, looked as if she might repeat her success as she outplayed the top seed in the first set and had the opportunity to gain an early break of serve in the second.

The sixth seeded Russian looked confident, used the width of the court and struck the ball cleanly.

Although Hingis made few glaring errors she appeared to have nothing in her arsenal to hurt Kournikova. But she survived two break points against her at 1-1 and then took advantage of some slack play from Kournikova to snatch a 4-2 lead.

After breaking again for the set, Hingis then built a 5-1 lead in the third before Kournikova staged a late fightback.

Hingis twice failed to serve out for the match, surrendering one match point at 5-1 and two more at 5-3, before breaking serve with her fourth match point.

"I didn't have enough patience to play on clay," said Hingis. "I wasn't able to play the shots I'm used to playing and I was a little bit nervous. But even though I didn't play my best I was still in the match. It wasn't that I didn't have any chances. I think a match like this helps me a lot to get ready for the semis and the next event."

Kournikova admitted to feeling tired after a busy time last weekend playing singles and doubles in the Fed Cup, but she considered she had played a good match.

"The match was very close and I played well, but then in the second set I was more defensive and Martina got ahead and I got frustrated," she said.

"I was a little bit tired after playing so many matches, and I think Martina was much fresher than me and that was a little bit of a factor. But it gives me confidence that I'm playing well."

Showman comes to Rome

ROME, May 6: World number one Andre Agassi will be topping the bill at the Masters Series event here next week, when Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten defends his title on the red clay of the Foro Italico, reports AFP.

Agassi, accompanied by girlfriend Steffi Graf, flew in to Rome on Thursday after a troubled period for the American tennis star.

He pulled out of the ATP tournament in Atlanta last month after suffering a recurrence of a hamstring problem during a second round match, and then skipped the subsequent Monte Carlo Masters.

All hopes of a successful defence of his French Open title at Roland Garros in Paris will rest on a solid performance here in a tournament which has seen him only once reach the final, losing way back in 1989.

But if there are question marks about the chances of the flamboyant crowd-favourite, the same is also true of Kuerten.

His defence of the Monte Carlo title last month ended in his very first match with a shock three-set defeat to Slovakia's Karol Kucera, who had not won since February.

That same day was also fatal for another Rome favourite, former world number one Marcelo Rios, who was dumped out by Spain's Felix Mantilla.

And for Rios, who was a winner here in 1998 and a losing finalist in 1997, things have hardly improved since.

Looking tired and short of form, the Chilean has bowed out of his last two tournaments in the second round -- losing to

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Looking