

Woodies in last four

LONDON, July 6: Australian pair Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde needed five sets to oust Canadian pair Sebastien Lareau and Daniel Nestor in their quarterfinal clash Wednesday...

The top seeds, the most successful doubles team in history, will now meet Swedish pair Nicklas Pietrangeli and Mikael Tillstrom, the number 11 seeds, in the last four after they beat third-seeded American duo Alex O'Brien and Jared Palmer 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, 6-3.

The Woodies, who last year helped Australia to the Davis Cup title are looking to scoop their sixth title of the season and their 59th career title as a team.

The Aussies first played together at New Haven in 1990 and this will be their last year as a combination as left-hander Woodforde is retiring.

If the Woodies were to win at both Wimbledon and the US Open, they will equal the record of 14 Grand Slam titles of their compatriots John Newcombe and Tony Roche.

They are also hoping to emulate their Atlanta gold medal with another victory at the Olympic Games in Sydney.

Hingis UN ambassador

BOGOTA, July 6: Number one ranked tennis player Martina Hingis is due to travel to Colombia for a two-day visit starting July 12 to promote a UN programme to help street children...

Hingis, a Swiss who lost the Wimbledon tennis quarter final to American Venus Williams, will come to the hemisphere's most violent nation in her capacity as UN goodwill ambassador, the spokeswoman said.

The trip was organised by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Colombia's First Lady Nohra Puyana de Pastrana.

Colombia is ravaged by a three-decade-old war between Communist rebels, ultra-right death squads, government security forces and powerful drug mobs.

Children are recruited by all sides in the conflict: more than 25,000 people, some 1,500 of them children, are murdered each year; and almost 3,000 citizens were kidnapped last year.

There is no exact census of children living on the streets in the capital Bogota but the number is thought to run into the hundreds. Many more are sent out on to the streets each day to beg or sell trinkets at traffic lights.

Rajshahi v'ball

From Our Correspondent RAJSHAH, July 6: The final match of the Durgapur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Volleyball tournament was held yesterday at the Upazila Parishad playground.

Upazila Education Officer team became champions defeating Upazila Nirbahi Officer team by 2-0 goals.

Nervous breakdown?

WASHINGTON, July 6: The father of tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams, facing each other in today's historic Wimbledon semifinal, said he had not slept all night because of nerves and did not think he would watch them play, reports Reuters.

"It was too hard to sleep. I didn't go to sleep last night thinking about it. I think it will be too hard to sit there and watch it," Richard Williams said in an interview with NBC's "Today" show. "I wish the wife was here to see it with me," he added.

Williams said before they left for Wimbledon today, he had told Venus, 20, and Serena, 18, that whatever happened on the court the family was more important.

"I said... let's get back to being a family right away," said Williams, who is their coach and manager.

It will be the first time two sisters have met in the semifinals of a Grand Slam event and only the third time in Wimbledon history that sisters have met in the tournament. On each previous occasion the older sister has won.

Whichever daughter lost the match, Williams said he would tell her she had "given it her best shot and let's move forward" to the next game.

Venus has won three of their four previous encounters including a second round win at the Australian Open in 1998.

Asked who would win, Williams predicted Serena would apply pressure from the beginning to deter Venus from her game plan. Venus, he said, had the tendency to let her opponent play the game, feel relaxed and then snatch it away.

Williams, who has said many times his tennis player daughters were destined for stardom, told NBC he felt very emotional about them both reaching the Wimbledon semifinal.

"The emotion that comes behind it is unbelievable. I can't explain it," he said.

The sisters have played tennis since they were toddlers and Williams said his most important advice was to make them believe in themselves.

"It just goes to show what can be done when a family pulls together," said Williams, who has three other daughters aside from Venus and Serena.



Scene from the fifth round of the Standard Chartered Bank schools' chess tournament at the NSC yesterday. —Star photo

Historic date awaits Aussies



MELBOURNE, July 6 (AFP): Australia will attempt to equal the world record number of consecutive Test wins when they face up to the record holders, the West Indies, in Brisbane on November 23.

The Australian Cricket Board confirmed its schedule Thursday for the 2000-01 season, including a five-Test series against the West Indies.

Australia must take the first Test to equal the West Indies' record of 11 consecutive wins, but the match will also be highlighted by the 40th anniversary of the Tied Test.

Australia and the West Indies fought out the first Tied Test in cricket history at the Gabba in the famous 1960-61 series featuring the likes of Richie Benaud and Wes Hall.

If Australia win at the Gabba, they will head to Perth for the second Test on December 1, hoping to create a new record of 12 wins, passing the mark set by Clive Lloyd's awesome West Indies team of the mid-1980s.

Steve Waugh's Australian team raced through last season in devastating style, sweeping Pakistan and India at home before another perfect run through New Zealand.

Zimbabwe will join Australia and the West Indies for a triangular one-day series in January and February.

The West Indies squad arrives in Australia on November 3 ahead of the traditional tour opener against the Chairman's XI at Lilac Hill on November 7.

Zimbabwe open their tour with a day-night match against Australia in Brisbane on November 12.

PCB puts forward India's tour fixture

KARACHI, July 6: India will play three Tests and five one-day games in Pakistan from December under a tentative itinerary sent to New Delhi Thursday, said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) director Yawar Saeed.

Saeed said the planned December 26 to February 12 tour had yet to be approved by the Indians.

"We have sent the itinerary to our counterparts in India for approval. It's a three Test and five one-day match series," Saeed told AFP.

He refused to comment on a controversy triggered by Pakistani team manager Mohammad Nasir's statement in Sri Lanka that the roots of match-fixing in cricket were in India.

"Indians are to blame for the match-fixing issue because all the bookies are from India," Nasir said in Colombo Monday.

The Indian cricket board reacted sharply to Nasir's statement and said it would protest to the PCB, according to press reports here.

Saeed said the PCB was waiting for an International Cricket Council report on Pakistani umpire Javed Akhtar, who was mentioned in last month's match-fixing inquiry in South Africa.

South African cricket chief Ali Bacher told the inquiry that he had heard that Akhtar took bribes to influence the outcome of a Test between England and South Africa at Leeds.

"When Akhtar officiated the Leeds Test in 1998 he was representing the ICC and we can only hold the ICC if we get the match referee's report from that particular Test," Saeed said.

"There's nothing against Akhtar and since he is a Pakistani we have to clear the matter."

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ITINERARY

- MELBOURNE, July 6 (Reuters): Itinerary of West Indies and Zimbabwe 2000/01 cricket tour of Australia: 2000 Nov 7: Chairman's XI v West Indies, Lilac Hill. Nov 9-12: Western Australia v West Indies, Perth. Nov 14: Northern Territory Cricket Association Invitational XI v West Indies, Alice Springs. Nov 17-20: Victoria v West Indies, Melbourne. Nov 23-27: First Test, Australia v West Indies, Brisbane. Dec 1-5: Second Test, Australia v West Indies, Perth. Dec 7: Prime Minister's XI v West Indies, Canberra. Dec 9-12: Australia A v West Indies, Hobart. Dec 15-19: Third Test, Australia v West Indies, Adelaide. Dec 26-30: Fourth Test, Australia v West Indies, Melbourne. 2001 Jan 2-6: Fifth Test, Australia v West Indies, Sydney. Jan 9: Australia A v West Indies (day night), Adelaide. Jan 11: Australia v West Indies (D/N), Melbourne. Jan 13: Australia A v Zimbabwe (D/N), Melbourne. Jan 14: Australia v West Indies (D/N), Brisbane. Jan 17: Australia v West Indies (D/N), Sydney. Jan 19: Australian Country XI v Zimbabwe, Bowral. Jan 21: Australia v Zimbabwe (D/N), Melbourne. Jan 23: West Indies v Zimbabwe (D/N), Sydney. Jan 25: West Indies v Zimbabwe (D/N), Adelaide. Jan 26: Australia v West Indies (D/N), Adelaide. Jan 28: Australia v Zimbabwe (D/N), Sydney. Jan 30: Australia v Zimbabwe, Hobart. Feb 2: West Indies v Zimbabwe (D/N), Perth. Feb 4: Australia v Zimbabwe, Perth. Feb 7: Triangular tournament, first final (D/N), Sydney. Feb 9: Triangular tournament, second final (D/N), Melbourne. Feb 11: Triangular tournament, third final (D/N), Melbourne (if required).

WIMBLEDON NOTEBOOK

LONDON, July 6 (AFP): Men's semifinalist Vladimir Voltchkov of Belarus was so sure he'd have gone home by now he's running out of clothes after prolonging his stay in London.

Asked why he was not wearing shorts that matched his top during his quarterfinal victory over Zimbabwean Byron Black he explained: "I didn't buy many new clothes this year. I had to borrow them off (Russian star and friend) Marat Safin."

Voltchkov's semifinal opponent Pete Sampras jokingly offered to lend him a pair of shoes — but only of the hard court variety.

CAMPING IT UP

The Williams sisters, set to meet each other Thursday in the women's singles semi-final, have introduced a fair amount of beef into the women's game in the past few years.

But proud father and coach Richard Williams says he never-erth tennis was a cissy game, he let slip in a recent interview.

VLAD THE GLADIATOR

Vladimir Voltchkov, only the second qualifier in Open Era history after John McEnroe in 1977 to make the Wimbledon men's semis, is clearly seeking gladiatorial inspiration as he prepares to face six-time champion Pete Sampras on Friday.

Asked what he did to kill time between matches the man from Minsk said he was quite a film fan — and there's one flick he's watched to excess.

"I've seen Gladiator four times already," he revealed.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Bookmakers Ladbrokes are offering a series of special bets on the women's singles semi-final clash between the Williams sisters.

The bookies go odds-on for the chance of there being a winning leap over the net from the victorious Williams sister to commiserate with the loser, quoting odds of 1-3.

They are also offering 10-1 on either sister to serve underarm in a bid to gain a surprise advantage on their serve.

An outside bet of 50-1 is offered on the wrong sister serving after hearing the umpire say "Miss Williams to serve."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT?

Virginia Wade, the last British woman to win a singles title at the All England Club, isn't too sure about the diets of modern players after an inspection of the food on offer at Wimbledon.

"There are just peppers everywhere. It just can't be good for the players' digestion," Wade commented after visiting the player's restaurant.

Andre peaking at right time

LONDON, July 6 (AFP): Perfect timing seems to be the secret for Andre Agassi as the Wimbledon Championships reach the semifinal stage.

A year ago, the American played the final and lost to Pete Sampras, who collected his sixth title at the All England Club.

But Agassi was riding momentum from a shock French Open title and shook off his Wimbledon setback to win the US Open over compatriot Todd Martin two months later.

It's different in 2000. Agassi's only major title has been the Australian Open, and his French Open was one to forget with an early loss.

But the resilient 30-year-old has timed his comeback to form perfectly. He hammered the big serve of Mark Philippoussis into submission 7-6, 6-3, 6-4 Wednesday and Friday plays Patrick Rafter in a repeat of last year's semifinal.

"My goal since Australia has really been to take care of myself physically and try to put myself in a position where I can raise my game at the most important time of the year," said the six-time Grand Slam champion.

"But it always doesn't work out as you planned. Paris certainly didn't."

"I was somewhat against the wall coming into this event," he admitted. "But as I've always said, if I can get through the first week, I can bring out different parts of my game in this court."

The American said that his miracle run of 1999 with French and US Open titles and the Wimbledon final was unlikely to be repeated.

"Today doesn't surprise me. I'm thankful that my game has come around at this time. I never felt my game was missing something. I just needed some matches."

While keeping his mind on his own development and winning run through the draw, Agassi hasn't failed to notice the impression the American Williams sisters are making at the event.

From a purely technical point of view, the master tennis craftsman favours little sister Serena in their semifinal.

"Fundamentally speaking, she's the stronger player, her forehand is better and she's a sounder mover," said the second seed. "You got to favour one of them to win the tournament."

"I don't know, it's always a psychological match-up. I can't imagine what it's like playing your sibling. But that's just how I see the match."



American top seed Pete Sampras makes a backhand return against compatriot Jan-Michael Gambill in the quarterfinals of the Wimbledon on July 5. —AFP photo

Men's semifinals

Voltchkov's date with destiny

LONDON, July 6 (AFP): He'd be the first to admit it hasn't been all that pretty so far but Pete Sampras has hung tough to take his customary place in the last four of a Wimbledon men's singles.

Sampras, on the verge of a historic 13th Grand Slam title and a record-equaling seventh Wimbledon crown, meets qualifier Vladimir Voltchkov on Friday with one eye on perennial rival and second seed Andre Agassi, who will face Aussie 12th seed Pat Rafter in the other showdown.

Sampras has battled through the pain barrier to make it this far after a litany of injury problems which the tournament organisers helpfully listed ahead of Wednesday's quarterfinal win over fellow American Jan-Michael Gambill.

The 28-year-old mega athlete from Washington could almost double as a doctor's study course on the basis of his injury catalogue from the past two years alone.

The run started at San Jose last year where he withdrew with an anterior tibial muscle cum tendon strain — that's just above the left ankle in plain English and a spasm in his lower leg forced him to miss Barcelona a few weeks later.

More recently a herniated disc made him sit out the US Open before a lower back strain brought another no-show in Scottsdale this year.

Here, Sampras endured tendinitis in his left shin and foot in his second-round match against Karol Kucera.

But here he is two wins away from surpassing Roy Emerson, with whom he shares the record of 12 Grand Slam singles titles to date and emulating William Renshaw, who won a seventh Wimbledon in 1889.

In beating Gambill, Sampras broke his previous personal best of 25 straight wins at Wimbledon.

Swedish legend Bjorn Borg holds that mark of 41 with his five straight wins between 1976 and 1981.

Sampras says the injury problems have forced him to stay off the practice courts more than he would like — but he's still confident of another success.

"I've been dealt this hand and there's not much I can do about it — just work through it. It's a challenge — this is what we play for."

"I'm looking forward to a little time off. But hopefully I can stay around for the weekend."

Voltchkov is out to write a little history of his own against Sampras as no qualifier has ever made the final here in the Open Era.

"I'll have to get a tape to see what his strengths and weaknesses are," said Sampras. "It's always tough playing someone you've never played before."

Voltchkov learned to play tennis on courts belonging to an automobile plant in his native Minsk.

"To play Pete in the semifinals of Wimbledon — it's like a dream come true," said Voltchkov, who is enjoying an unexpected late birthday present after turning 22 on Tuesday.

Sampras, yet to face a seed, is not in a mood to have his own dreams punctured though he admits: "You can't take any match for granted."

Agassi, whom Sampras beat in an almost flawless performance in the final 12 months ago with the former on a roll after completing his Grand Slam set with the French Open title, meanwhile looks as menacing as ever as he gears up to face Rafter.

Having died with disaster in the second round, where he saved two match points against Todd Martin, the Las Vegas showman showed in his four-set quarterfinal defeat of Australian serve machine Mark Philippoussis that he is unquestionably the best returner in the game.

And all the omens point in the American's favour.

He not only beat Rafter in the semis last year in straight sets — even before the Queenslander was laid up with shoulder trouble — but beat him in the third round in 1993.

In fact, Agassi is almost always ready to pounce on an Aussie — having a 10-1 Grand Slam record against the men from Down Under including the win over Philippoussis.

Almost — because the exception was a Rafter win in the US Open round of 16 three years ago.

"This is a great arena to play Pat because it's Wimbledon. He's one of the best competitors out there, if not the best," said Agassi.

"We had a great match last year with a lot of high quality tennis and I don't expect anything less in a couple of days time."

Rafter, like Sampras yet to face a seed, now faces his toughest imaginable test.

"Well, you have to be on top of your game. You hope Andre has one of his bad days. I've played Andre a few times when he's had really bad days. I just hope he has one."

"The number one thing is that you have got to serve well and you've got to do it well all day. If you can do that then you have a chance."

Otherwise, it'll be *deja vu* all over again come Sunday with Centre Court showing Pete versus Andre — the Sequel.

New drama in Hansiegate

JOHANNESBURG, July 6 (Internet report): The King commission of inquiry is investigating a telephone call to a radio station by an unknown man who apparently knew on 28 March what was only announced on 7 April.

The Star newspaper in Johannesburg reports that the phone call suggests that Cronje's dealings with bookmakers were no secret well before an official announcement was made.

The call in question took place on 28 March this year when a man phoned 702 Talk Radio. In an error, he ended up getting through to telephone counsellor, Laraine Lane. Now the King commission hopes to track the call to throw more light on the scandal.

The mysterious caller wanted to get through to the newsroom at 702 Talk Radio, but, unbeknown to him, he told the telephone counsellors that he had heard that Cronje was going to be sacked for committing a crime.

Lane says: "I received a confidential call from a white male who said he'd heard that Cronje had committed a crime and might be arrested. At that time, the team was in Sharjah."

This suggests there was information circulating before the early-morning call to Ali Bacher.

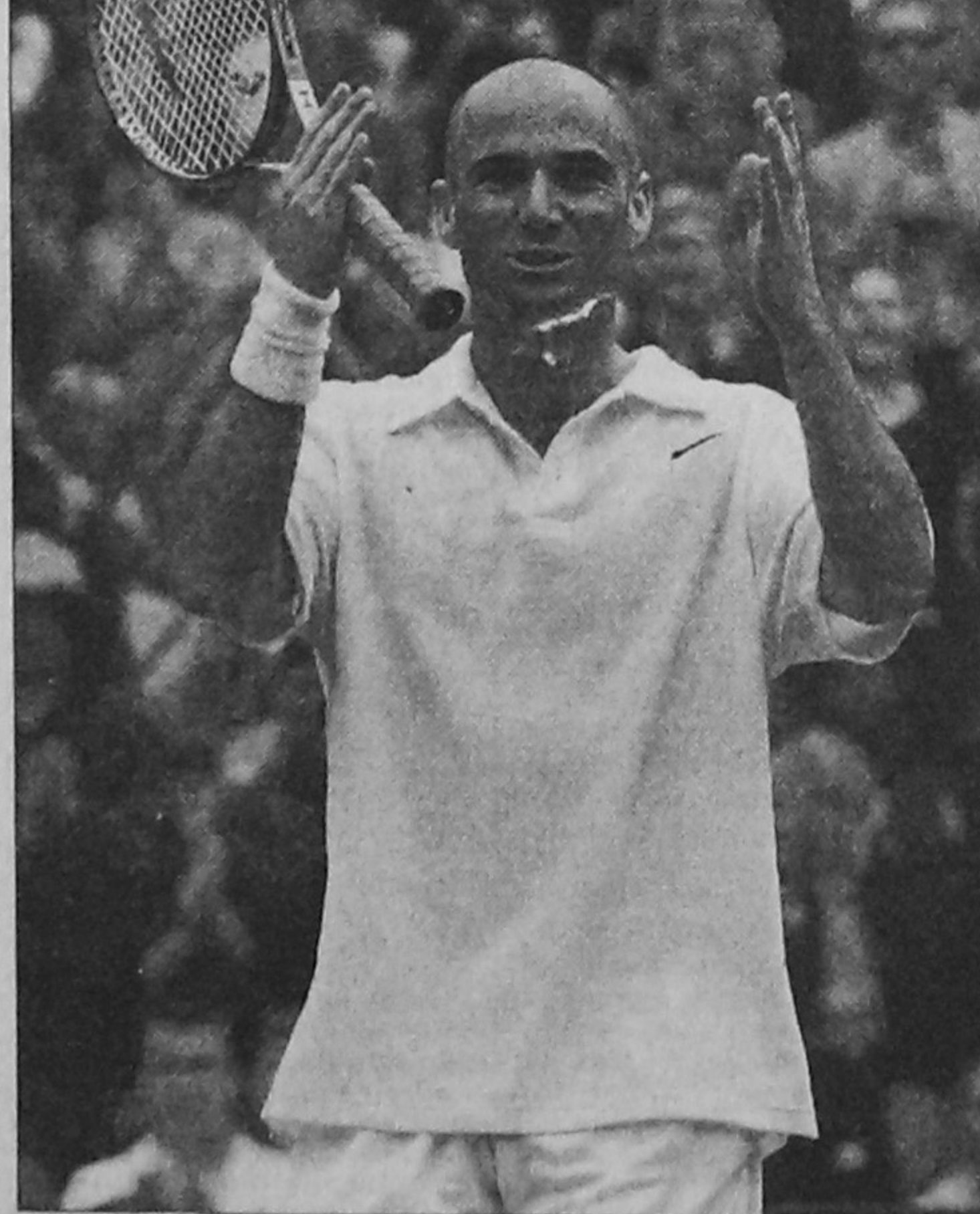
Because the call came through to the counselling section, Lane was not allowed to

demand the man's name and contact details, but she did record the call.

The Star newspaper meanwhile received a detailed fax from Ian Logan, a Johannesburg-based television personality, reading: "Hansie should pay all taxes due; pay fines for breaking (foreign) exchange control regulations; lose his home to the Asset Forfeiture Unit; donate R1-million (100 000 pounds sterling) to cricket

development for South African youth; and do five years of community service, the same period of time he was abusing his power and lining his pockets."

A popular suggestion is that it should be mandatory for players to report, in writing and within 24 hours of it happening, any approach made by a bookmaker or punter aimed at influencing the outcome of a match.



American Andre Agassi responds to the crowd's applause after his Wimbledon quarterfinal win over Aussie Mark Philippoussis on July 5. —AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Clues include: 1 Leprechaun's dance, 4 Crimson Tide school, 8 Elbowz, 12 Actor Tognazzi, 13 Obsessed seaman, 14 Sandwich treat, 15 With French interjection, 16 Lycopodium, e.g., 17 See, 18 Across, 21 Lettuce variety, 22 Science Guy, 23 Myopic cartoon character, 26 Expert, 27 Hardly an exemplar of grace, 30 Mommy kissing..., 31 Poolroom ne'er-do-well, 32 Jazzy style, 33 Firmament, 34 Neighbor of Ind, 35 Held the scepter, 36 Bottom or line, 37 UK ref. bk., 38 Pop singer (anagram of ADD), 45 Stromboli spillage, 46 'Livin' on a Vid' —, 47 Protrude, 48 Quite eager, 49 Suitable, 51 Across, 52 Craggy peaks, 20 Bar order of context?, 23 — for the million..., 24 Festive, 25 Biv, 26 Diving, 27 Tin Woodman's need, 28 'Hall, 29 Green's greetings, 30 Spar, 31 Mythalic place, 32 Penultimate New Testament book, 34 Sample of words, 35 Settles a debt, 36 Broadway platform, 37 The messy roommate, 38 Medici, 39 Fashion, 40 Songwriter, 41 Julian's stepmom, 42 Comet competitor, 43 Cartoonist, 44 Poker variety.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers. The grid contains the following letters: Q, W, S, W, T, V, X, V, X, C, B, M, Y, M, V, K, W, M, X, T, W, V, S, X, Q, Y, E, T, Q, C, G, Q, Z, C, X, O, W, L, Y, E, W, M, C, M, B, V, M, L, G, Z, Y, O, Q, C, M, B, O, C, K, W, X. Below the grid is the text: "Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN CONAN'S HAIR GETS TOO LONG, HE WILL USUALLY GET IT CUT BY A BARBER-IAN. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals S"

The Cryptoquip 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.