

Rafter ready to roll

BRISBANE, July 12: Wimbledon runner-up Pat Rafter arrived back in Australia yesterday saying his rushed preparation for Friday's Davis Cup semifinal against Brazil was a mixed blessing, reports Reuters.

Rafter spoke to reporters at Brisbane airport after flying in just before midnight, anxious to get some rest before his first-round singles clash with French Open champion Gustavo Kuerten on the makeshift grass courts at ANZ Stadium.

"I don't think I've ever gotten in this late before for a Davis Cup," he said.

"I've always prepared really well for it but at the same time I've had a lot of matches and I'm taking a bit of confidence in so that probably is the saving grace and hopefully it will work in our favour."

Rafter missed Australia's Davis Cup final win over France in Nice in December because of a shoulder injury.

Wimbledon quarterfinalist Mark Philippoussis was Australia's hero on that occasion, but has become its villain, withdrawing shortly before the semifinal because of inflammation of his left knee.

At his post-Wimbledon final news conference, Rafter accused Philippoussis of "jerk[ing] us around."

Rafter said he did not want to comment further on his recent criticism of Philippoussis. "Everything that I have said about Mark has been said and I'd like to sort of leave it that way now and hopefully we can sort out something after this Davis Cup because it would be nice to settle it all down," Rafter said.

The dual US Open champion said he was abandoning plans for a few days off after a tough two weeks at Wimbledon because of his desire to take part in his country's Davis Cup defence.

Rusedski breaks up with coach

LONDON, July 12: Greg Rusedski, whose first-round loss at Wimbledon marked the latest setback in his slumping career, has parted with Dutch coach Sven Groeneveld, reports AP.

Groeneveld has coached the Canadian-born British player for two years, but the two decided to split after the humiliating Wimbledon defeat. Rusedski was beaten by American Vince Spadea, who had lost a record 21 straight matches until then.

"We have achieved some excellent results together but both feel that the time is right to move on," Rusedski said in a written statement Wednesday. "This is a mutual decision and we shall remain the best of friends."

"I am quite confident with Greg's potential game, that he will be able to play the kind of tennis that has consistently kept Greg among the world's best," Groeneveld said.

Groeneveld took over as Rusedski's coach after his bitter split with Tony Pickard, who had replaced Brian Teacher.

I'm not

From page 13

has reported to have added and claims he is working hard to lose it again.

"I've put on a bit of weight," he said. "I accept that, but nowhere near a stone like some have claimed, more like a couple of kilos."

"I had realised that before all this blew up and I have been trying hard to get it off. Last winter I worked hard to keep in shape and I think I succeeded and I haven't been doing anything different this summer — I know it's important to watch what I eat and drink."

The biggest concern to Flintoff at present, however, is his long-standing back problem, which has threatened his England career in the future and his participation in Thursday's day-night international against Zimbabwe at Old Trafford.

"My back is a real concern," he admitted. "On Saturday I felt fine, but on Sunday morning when I woke up I was stiff and sore and I couldn't guarantee bowling my 10 overs."

"I don't know what causes it to go like that. Obviously it's a worry, no-one worries about it more than me because it is affecting my career."

"Hopefully I'll be okay to play on Thursday, but if the back trouble is not sorted out, I accept I will find it hard to keep my place."

"I want to do well for England and I will do everything I can to prove the critics wrong."

Zimbabwe going

From page 13

WEST INDIES

Gayle c Streak b Johnson 6

Campbell c G Flower b Johnson 6

Hinds c b P Strang 9

Lara b Streak 3

Adams run out 10

Powell b Viljoen 14

Jacobs lbw b G Flower 37

Rose lbw b P Strang 30

McLean not out 50

Dillon not out 6

Extras: (lb-4; w-15) 19

Total: (For 8 wickets in 50 overs) 166

Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-18, 3-23, 4-40, 5-40, 6-57, 7-103, 8-157

Did not bat: Corey Collymore

Bowler O M R W

Johnson 6 0 16 2

B Strang 10 2 35 1

Streak 8 0 23 1

Viljoen 8 1 23 1

P Strang 10 0 58 1

G Flower 5 0 18 1

Whitall 1 0 3 0

Result: Zimbabwe won by 70 runs

Man-of-the-match: Guy Whitall.



LIVING LEGENDS: Former NBA superstar Magic Johnson (L) and former German tennis superstar Boris Becker greet each other during a ceremony in Mexico City on July 11. The function was organised to mark the launching of American Online (AOL) Mexico internet service. —AFP photo

Scientist pulls for Lee

SYDNEY, July 12: If Australian Brett Lee is a chucker, so are most other Test fast bowlers, a leading biomechanics expert said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is to review the 23-year-old tearaway bowler's action after he was reported for throwing by two Indian umpires during the Test series against New Zealand in March and April.

The Australian Cricket Board will call on a biomechanics expert to try to prove Lee's innocence when his case is heard by the ICC's illegal deliveries panel.

Bruce Mason, manager of the biomechanics department at the Canberra-based Australian Institute of Sport, said all bowlers would be under suspicion if their actions were examined closely enough.

"In raising Brett Lee's defence a biomechanical analysis needs to be done," Mason said, adding the "naked eye" or even slow motion relays didn't clarify the situation.

Mason said modern technology would show up many players.

"I could pull out a whole raft of bowlers and show you that at some stage of some of their deliveries they have an illegal action — every bowler is going to do that to some degree."

"If you had good quality, high-speed film, you could disqualify a whole lot of fast bowlers."

Asked if he had seen many bowlers he would describe as "perfect", Mason said: "Generally you see faults in everyone."

Mason said most fast bowlers got into trouble when they tried to extract more effort than their normal delivery.

In Lee's case, the two umpires — Arani Jayaprakash and

Srinivas Venkataraghavan — specifically criticised Lee's "elbow ball".

Mason suggested a scientific model should be drawn up which allows all bowlers some

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"They're not really seeing a bent elbow, they're seeing an image in their brain that tells them something is wrong and they're interpreting it as a bent elbow."

But Mason said umpires "were no more skilled than anyone else" at making a judgement on an illegal delivery.

"With high-speed camera it takes about four or five hours of looking at a bowler's action and evaluating it before we can decide he's throwing it."

Meanwhile, there was unexpected support for Lee Wednesday from Pakistan cricket manager Brigadier Mohammed Nasir, who only recently was forced to defend the action of Pakistani quick Shoaib Akhtar, said the inquiry would not mean the end of Lee's international career.

"In my personal opinion I found nothing wrong with him," Nasir told ABC radio here.

"This is one of those things where if the umpires have raised some doubts or suspicion I'm sure if, at all, some remedial measures are required, it will be done and Brett Lee will be there for a long, long time to come."

And Australia's Cricketers' Association boss Tim May said the handling of the chucking allegations were totally unsatisfactory.

May complained about the four-month delay in telling Australia of the reports, and called for an overhaul of the ICC's review process.

He said the pressure on players from such allegations required they be dealt with as soon as possible.

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Sampras doubtful

NEW YORK, July 12: Pete Sampras, who has won more Grand Slam events than any other man, said here yesterday he was unlikely to represent the United States in this month's Davis Cup semifinal round against Spain, reports AFP.

Sampras has tendinitis in his left leg and wants to talk with Davis Cup captain John McEnroe before a final decision is made last night.

He said it was unlikely he would make the trip to Santander, a northern coastal town in Spain, where golfer Seve Ballesteros once lived and King Juan Carlos has a summer home. The semifinal will be played on July 21-23.

The winner will advance to meet either defending champion Australia or Brazil in the December final.

Davis Cup spokesman Randy Walker said the semifinal team would be announced by McEnroe today.

Sampras, 28, won his seventh Wimbledon singles title when he beat Aussie Patrick Rafter on Sunday in four sets to take his grand slam tally to a record 13, passing Australia's Roy Emerson.

When he competed at Wimbledon, Sampras was examined by a doctor who advised him to rest for about two weeks.

Over the years, Sampras has had several injuries that have stopped him from playing in the Davis Cup, much to McEnroe's displeasure.

McEnroe, who is in his first year as the 37th US Davis Cup captain, has an overall record of 59-10 in Davis Cup matches, including 41-8 in singles.

The semifinal against Spain will be played in a 10,500-seat stadium on a surface upon which Sampras has not had success in a Grand Slam event.

He has yet to win the French Open, which is played on clay.

But in Davis Cup matches, Sampras is 6-0 when playing on clay. Andre Agassi is 10-2 on clay in the Davis Cup. Agassi, Todd Martin and Jan-Michael Gambill are expected to make up the US team if Sampras withdraws.

The US team is 56-18 on clay. The first time the Americans played on clay was for a 5-0 result against Mexico in Mexico City in 1928. The US team has won its past eight Davis Cup matches on clay. America's last loss on clay was 3-2 against Paraguay in Asuncion in 1987.

The US team beat Spain 3-2 in Barcelona on clay when the two last met there in a semifinal in 1972.

Woodruff ends losing streak

NEWPORT, Rhode Island, July 12: Top seed and defending champion Chris Woodruff snapped a six-match losing streak on Tuesday as he advanced to the second round of the 375,000 dollars Hall of Fame Tennis Championships, reports Reuters.

Woodruff had few problems in defeating fellow American Michael Russell in straight sets 6-1, 6-2. It was his first triumph since a second-round victory in mid-April at Atlanta.

Before his slump, Woodruff had reached his first career Grand Slam quarter-final at the Australian Open in January and two other events. Last year, Woodruff captured the championship by edging Kenneth Carlsen in three sets.

Second seed Gianluca Pozzi of Italy continued his fine play on grass this season as he moved into the second round with a 7-6 (7-4) 6-4 triumph over Anthony Dupuis of France.

At other grass events this season, Pozzi reached the semifinals at the Stella Artois Championships, the quarterfinals at Nottingham and the fourth round at Wimbledon.

Fifth seed Jason Stoltenberg of Australia came back to defeat 1998 runner-up Neville Goodwin of South Africa 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8-6). Goodwin defeated Stoltenberg in the semifinals here two years ago but had to go through qualifying this year to make the main draw.

In other first-round matches, Tomas Ketola of Finland beat Justin Gimelstob of the United States 7-6 (7-4), 2-6, 6-3 and American Bob Bryan defeated countryman qualifier Jim Thomas 7-5, 6-2.

A pair of qualifiers advanced when Scott Draper of Australia posted a 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 triumph over Spain's Oscar Burrieza and Marty Fish of the United States took care of Cristiano Caratti of Italy 6-7 (2-7), 6-3, 6-4.

Peter Wessels of the Netherlands moved to the second round after Daniel Nestor of Canada retired heading into the third set with the match tied at a set apiece.

The Netherlands' Jens Knippschild nipped Marcos Ondruska of South Africa 6-3, 6-7 (7-5), 6-2.

First prize is 49,500 dollars.

Neiland's fall from grace

LONDON, July 12: Latvia's Larisa Neiland has been stripped of the prize money she won at the 1999 Australian Open after testing positive for caffeine, reports Reuters.

Neiland, winner of six Grand Slam doubles and mixed doubles titles, will forfeit the \$15,134 she received for reaching the doubles quarterfinals at the Australian Open with Spain's Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) said in its weekly news bulletin.

Neiland, 33, tested positive for the stimulant at the tournament but the announcement of her punishment was delayed until the appeals procedure had run its course.

John's cause for concern



BRISBANE, Australia, July 12: Captain John Newcombe has hinted the pivotal

doubles match could be Australia's undoing in this weekend's Davis Cup tennis semifinal against Brazil on grass at ANZ Stadium here, reports AFP.

Newcombe has yet to reveal who will partner Wimbledon doubles champion Mark Woodforde in Saturday's third rubber, but said Australia faced a tough battle against French Open champion Gustavo Kuerten and Jaime Oncins.

Brazil are bidding to reach their first-ever Davis Cup final. The winners play either Spain or the United States in the final.

"If you go onto the court thinking that's not a threat, you're stupid and you'll lose," Newcombe said Wednesday.

"I don't think we're stupid and we don't intend to lose, but we've got a very big battle on our hands, even though the conditions are our home conditions."

The weary Australian team practised for the first time Wednesday after rushing back from London in the early hours of Wednesday.

Wimbledon singles finalist Pat Rafter, Lleyton Hewitt and Sandon Stolle arrived just after midnight, while Woodforde touched down at 5am Wednesday just 48 hours from the start

of Friday's tie.

Newcombe refused to concede the Australian doubles combination was the team's weak link.

However, the Brazilian duo have dropped one set in wins over France and Slovakia this year, having won 10 of 11 doubles matches so far.

Australia have split their doubles matches this year after last year losing two matches in five sets before lifting the Davis Cup title against France in Nice last December.

"I wouldn't call it a weak link," Newcombe said. "We've lost some and the one's we've lost have been pretty close."

"Kuerten and Oncins are a very good pair and they've got a great Davis Cup record."

"It's a key match for them and a key match for us and as I understand it they've been doing a lot of work on their doubles in the last four days."

"In the first four years that Tony (Rochie) and I were in charge of the team we were winning all our doubles and not winning enough singles matches."

"You'd hope to win the doubles, but we've been winning the matches and that's the key thing."

Meanwhile, Woodforde shrugged off his weariness and said he was looking forward to combining with Sandon Stolle, despite suggestions Rafter would be called up to play the doubles.

"I'm sure Stolle will be named," Woodforde said Wednesday.

"I'll be confident to play with Sandon as I've played two Grand Slam doubles finals against him in the past month and I know he's playing as well as I am."

"So what may look like a dilemma on paper is not such an issue really."

The Brazilian team continued their preparations with Kuerten appearing to practise well despite Tuesday's groin injury concerns.

The official draw will be made here on Thursday.

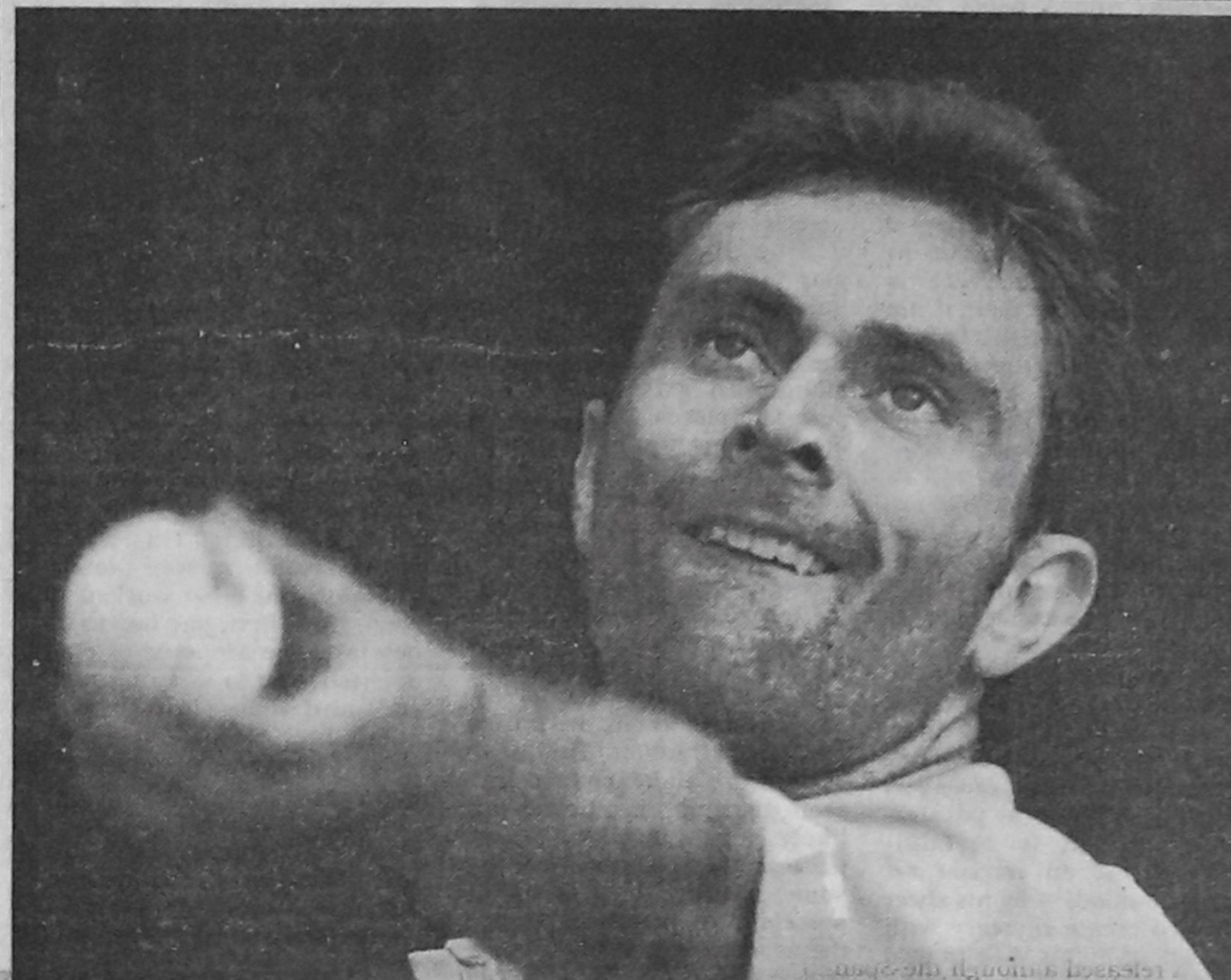
SCUD RETALIATES

Embattled Mark Philippoussis Wednesday said he was frustrated and upset at Pat Rafter's criticisms of his late withdrawal from the Davis Cup team.

"Speaking here for the first time about the furore, Philippoussis accused teammate Rafter of being uninformed about the issue."

Philippoussis came under fire from Rafter at the weekend after saying he wanted to rest an inflamed knee rather than play in the semifinal against the Brazilians, starting on Friday in Brisbane.

"I think that Pat's been uninformed. He's had his shoulder problems and he hasn't played Davis Cup or he's played only doubles," Philippoussis said on television.



Spaniard Felix Mantilla going to serve against countryman Fernando Vicente during their first round match of the Swiss Open in Gstaad on July 11. —AFP photo

An unforgettable day



WIMBLEDON, July 12 (AP): More than just the players were black on 'People's Monday' at Cen

tre Court.

The bastion of tennis has never seen so many non-white faces in one day, fallout from the "Venus and Serena Williams effect" as Wimbledon opened up Centre Court for 50,000 fans (7,500 dollars) on Monday to the hot polo.

"Never been here in my life," said Mia Morris, 41, snuggled up high in Row S on a blustery day as the American sisters won the women's double title in a match put off from Sunday by rain.

Morris is black and British but never had bothered with the 10-minute trip from her home to the All England Club. "What I like is these girls don't come over as sports brats, they haven't been pampered."

Michele Williams, 25, and no relation to the Americans, sat alongside. She's black and travelled two hours from the northern city of Birmingham to see the champions who promise to change the face of tennis.

John Crowther, the chief executive of the British Lawn Tennis Association, is talking about bringing the Williams family roadshow to Britain's inner-city neighbourhoods, using their exuberance and talent to promote urban tennis.

Serena Williams is all for it. "That sounds really great, we love it here," Serena said Monday. The sisters won two Wimbledon titles this year — doubles and Venus in singles — and between them they've won a whopping nine Grand Slam titles.

"It would be really great in Britain to get some minority tennis players involved. We're all up for the idea. It's a fantastic plan."

A British man hasn't won Wimbledon in 64 years; a British woman for 23. This year, British singles players were eliminated after a week.

What's the problem? Perhaps the weather, or perhaps the game's snobbish image and a facet in the English character that's suspicious of success.

"I don't think it would be allowed to happen here," said Michele Williams, leaving the famous stadium looking to "see where John McEnroe sits."

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