

Costa, Puerta progress

GSTAAD, Switzerland, July 16: Little more than 90 minutes of dry evening weather were enough Saturday for defending champion Albert Costa and Argentine Mariano Puerta to book delayed semifinal spots at the 600,000-dollar Gstaad Open, reports AFP.

Costa, a two-time holder seeded fourth, crushed Czech Jiri Novak 6-3, 6-1, while Puerta, number eight at an event still behind schedule due to a week of rain, defeated Sebastian Grosjean of France 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Both contests in chilly weather were concluded as home rain fell. In addition to the rain, temperatures have remained in the wintery 8-15 centigrade range, making for a thoroughly miserable week.

The two evening matches finally began after eight hours of intermittent rain interruptions -- five in all to the day's programme.

ATP Tour officials and the tournament are keen to wrap up the high-altitude clay event on Sunday if at all possible but are prepared for a Monday finale if the weather does not cooperate. Puerta was just glad to get out with a victory, which pits him against Spain's Costa Sunday morning.

He won a first-set tiebreaker against Florida-based Grosjean and then broke in the second set of the second to pave the way to the drizzly victory.

"At this altitude, topspin works very well," said the two-time clay titleholder. "It's great for me. Argentinians, Guillermo Vilas, out tennis idol, played like that."

"I'm very happy with the victory. I want to play the final Monday."

Costa improved to 3-1 against Novak, who played his second round match on Thursday morning. The Spaniard broke the Czech twice in the second set for the win.

With light fading and light rain still falling, concluding quarterfinals between top seed Alex Corretja and number 7 Marcelo Rios plus an all-Argentine contest between Gaston Gaudio and Franco Squillari contest were postponed.

Costa played a single, final game early Saturday to wrap up his delayed.

Second-round match over new American Davis Cup captain Vince Spadea 6-2, 6-2 after leading 6-2, 5-2.

"I'm thrilled to be on the team," Spadea said Saturday. "This is a lifetime achievement and one I want to take advantage of," he said. "I'm honoured that he (coach John McEnroe) called me. I didn't hesitate to come back with a positive answer."

Other second-round results in between showers, sixth seed Squillari ousted Swiss Marc Rosset 6-3, 7-5, while Gaudio beat Max Mirnyi of Belarus 6-2, 4-6, 7-5.

Romania move ahead of Zimbabwe

HARARE, July 16: Romania's Andrei Pavel and Gabriel Trifu put Romania into a 2-1 lead after their doubles match against Zimbabwe here in a World Group qualifier, reports AFP.

The experienced Pavel and the hard-hitting Trifu beat Zimbabwe's Kevin Ullyett and Wayne Black in straight sets 7-5, 6-2, 7-6 (7/2).

From the moment the Romanians broke the very first serve of the match -- by the unfortunate Ullyett -- they were in command.

The Zimbabweans levelled after breaking Pavel but when Black's service failed at the critical 5-5 stage, the first set was Romania's.

In the second set, both Black and Ullyett were broken by Gaudio and Trifu and they coasted to 6-2.

Ullyett and Black appeared likely to stage a comeback when they sped to a 5-2 lead over their opponents as Pavel tried to steady Trifu, whose backhand was being exposed.

Kenyan sweep

SYDNEY, July 16: Kenyan athletes dominated Sydney's annual City to Surf road race Sunday which was marred by the death of a runner, reports AFP.

Laban Chege won his second consecutive race, clocking 40 minutes 24 seconds, 21 seconds outside Australian Steve Monaghan's 1991 record.

Chege led home countrymen Godfrey Kiprotich and Simon Kisimili ahead of a 50,342 field. "It was a tough run and the record is not easy to beat. I ran my best and couldn't get close," said Chege who won last year's race in 40 mins 27secs. "I hope to come back next year and try for three in a row and maybe the record but it will be hard to break."

The Kenyans set out at the start as a group followed by Australian Olympic marathoner Rob de Hirden who finished fourth, 11m15s behind the winner.

The race was marred by the death of a 30-year man who suffered a heart attack and struck his head heavily as he fell, a police spokesman said.

Aussies blank Brazil

BRISBANE, July 16: The Aussies see the doubles as Spain's weakness should they meet them in the Davis Cup tennis final in December, reports AFP.

Australia wrapped up a 5-0 win over Brazil in the semifinal here with reverse singles victories by Lleyton Hewitt and Pat Rafter Sunday to book their 45th Davis Cup final appearance.

As much as John Newcombe's team would cherish a home final against Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi in the glamour US team, they are certain Spain will win next weekend's semifinal in Santander to ensure the final will be played in Barcelona on clay.

It will represent a daunting challenge for Australia with Hewitt and Rafter preferring

grass and hardcourt ahead of clay, but they are preparing for a monumental challenge to see out Newcombe and coach Tony Roche in their final year in charge of the team.

"Everybody hates going to play Spain in Spain," said Newcombe Sunday.

"They're so tough on clay, but put them at home and you have double trouble there."

"The only thing about the Spaniards is that they don't do very well in doubles, so you can sort of go in and say, 'We've got to win two of the four singles matches to win the tie,' because you should win the doubles."

Newcombe didn't go as far as US captain John McEnroe in detailing the perceived weaknesses of Spanish tennis.

McEnroe admits his team are huge "underdogs" in the semifinal against Spain on

their favourite red-clay surface, but declared: "The only good news is that Spain has historically under-achieved and choked, we'll see if they do it again."

ROAD TO THE FINAL

Sept 25-27 1998 - Uzbekistan (home) 5-0

April 2-4 1999 - Zimbabwe (away) 4-1

July 16-18 1999 - United States (away) 4-1

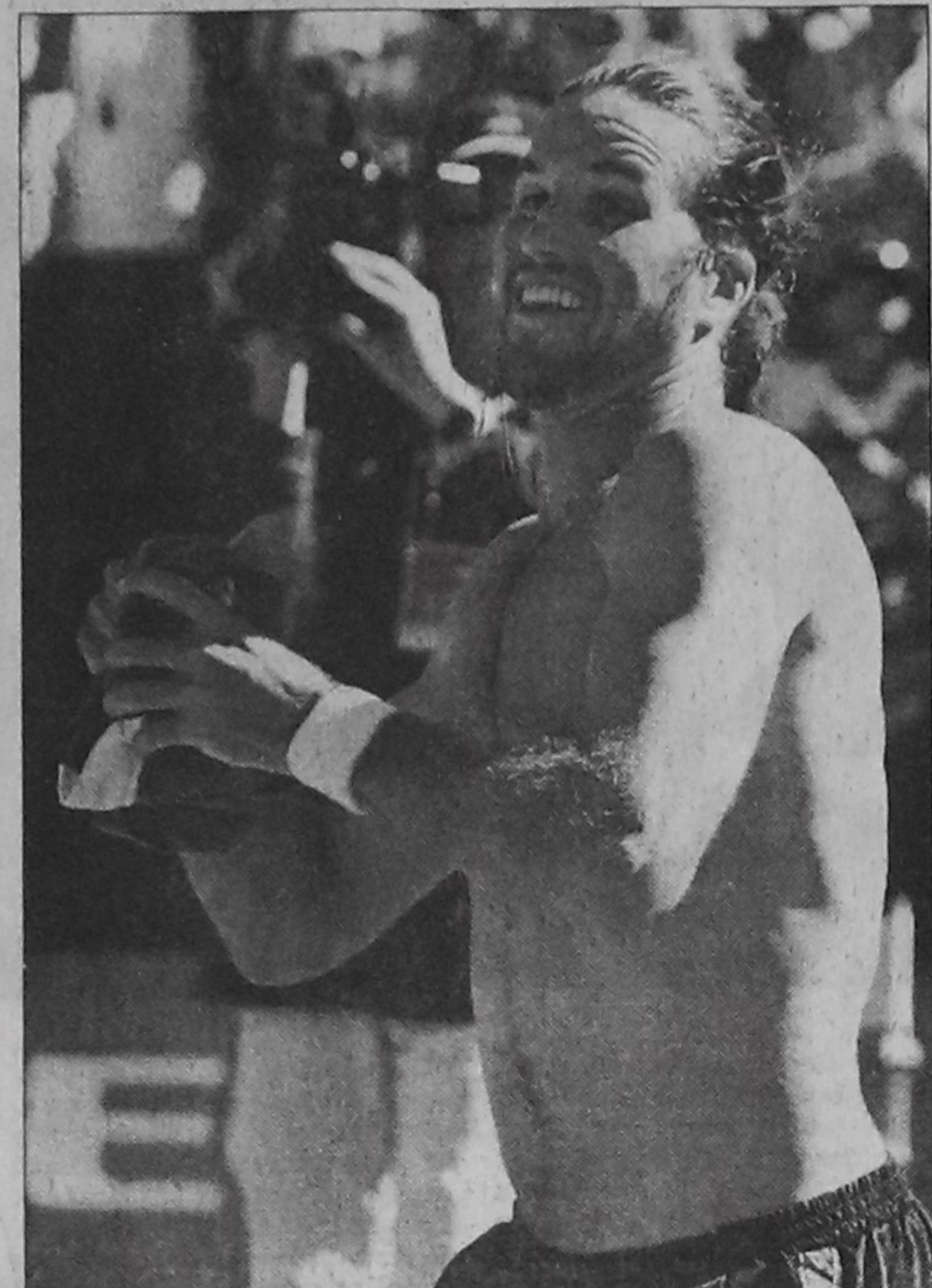
Sept 24-26 1999 - Russia (home) 4-1

Dec 3-5 1999 - France (final away) 3-2

Feb 4-6 2000 - Switzerland (away) 3-2

April 7-9 2000 - Germany (home) 3-2

July 14-16 2000 - Brazil (home) 5-0



Patrick Rafter of Australia throws his shirt into the spectators' stand after beating Brazilian Fernando Meligeni in the final Davis Cup reverse singles match in Brisbane yesterday. — AFP photo

Uzbeks owe Oleg one

TASHKENT, July 16: Uzbekistan's top player Oleg Ogorodov gave himself a timely birthday present and saved his squad from the indignity of whitewashing in their Davis Cup World Group qualifier against the Netherlands here Sunday by beating Sjeng Schalken in straight sets, reports AFP.

Ogorodov, who celebrated his 28th birthday Sunday, fought a tough battle to take the opening set of the reverse singles tie 6-4 in 50 minutes.

In the second set both players kept their services until the seventh game, when Ogorodov made the crucial break for a 4-3 lead, and went on to win the game 6-3, and put the tie at 4-1 in favour of the Dutch.

Afterwards Ogorodov said he was pleased that the win came on his birthday after losing Friday's opening singles tie against Dutch player Richard Krajicek 6-4, 6-3, 6-4.

"We failed to win the match so I felt I had to do something nice for our fans for their support. And I'm glad I did it," he added.

In the first singles of the day Paul Haarhuis gave his squad an unbeatable 4-0 lead against hosts Uzbekistan, overcoming Vadim Kutsenko in straight sets.

Haarhuis, who replaced Krajicek in the third day's reverse singles, defeated Kutsenko 6-1, 6-2 in 55 minutes on the red clay of Tashkent NBU tennis stadium.

TA won't help the Scud

BRISBANE, Australia, July 16: Tennis Australia will not intervene and insist on Mark Philippoussis being chosen for the Australian team for the Davis Cup final if the stayaway star is left out, reports AFP.

TA president Geoff Pollard said Sunday it was up to the selection committee to choose the best team from the players available for the December 8-10 final against Spain or the United States, who play off next weekend.

Philippoussis may not be here for the semifinal against Brazil, crying off with a knee injury, but he looms large in Australia's Davis Cup deliberations.

Team captain John Newcombe only learned of Philippoussis' unavailability when he rang him at his Melbourne home from London last Saturday, forcing a late change of plans for the Brazil tie.

Wimbledon finalist Pat Rafter criticised Philippoussis for "jerk[ing] the Australian team around following the Scud's late withdrawal and team member Lleyton Hewitt Sunday called for his renewed commitment to the Davis Cup."

Newcombe, in his seventh and last year as non-playing Australian captain, foreshadowed the bypassing of Philippoussis for the Cup final when he said he intended to keep the team which Sunday completed a 5-0 sweep over the Brazilians in the semifinal.

"The way we are looking at it right now the team that did the job in the semi will be the one that does the job in the final," said Newcombe.

There were suggestions that Pollard, as the country's top tennis official, might step in and overrule that, but he stated his position on Sunday.

"Our process is that all Australian players are eligible for selection, and we like to think all are available for selection, but we have a selection committee and they are the ones that pick the team," he said.

"I don't think I have the right (to intervene) under our constitution. I've never done it before and the other times I've seen presidents in other sports do it and it's generally backfired."

Pollard called for more direct communication between Philippoussis and the Davis Cup team.

"We need to have direct communication with Mark, not through a whole range of intermediaries," he said.

Philippoussis has a chequered history of committing himself to playing for his

country. He has played in three of Australia's previous eight Cup ties. He was the hero in last year's final victory over France in Nice.

The biggest controversy came when he made himself unavailable for the Davis Cup tie against Zimbabwe in Milidura, NSW, in 1998 because of a dispute with Newcombe and coach Tony Roche, only to then turn up and watch his teammates fall to an ignominious 3-2 defeat.

Hewitt Sunday spoke of the team's feelings towards Philippoussis.

"A lot of things have to be sorted out," he said after his 6-4, 6-1 win over Andre Sa.

"Obviously, the conversations that went on before this week were pretty ordinary, and that is going to have to be fixed."

"With a new captain and coach coming in next year, it is going to be a whole new ball game. They are going to have to set down the law right from the start and you have to put yourself on the line every time for your country."

Newcombe was non-committal about the thorny issue Sunday, saying there was a "lot of water under the bridge" with the US Open and the Sydney Olympics to come before the Davis Cup final in five months' time.

Ecuador edge in front

LONDON, July 16: Ecuador are just one rubber away from victory in their Davis Cup tie with Great Britain after brothers Nicolas and Giovanni Lapentti defeated Tim Henman and Arvind Parmar 6-3, 7-5, 6-3 on Saturday in the doubles, reports AFP.

That triumph in 1 hour 56 minutes left the South Americans 2-1 ahead with just the two reverse singles to come while the British are staring relegation from the World Group in the face.

In the 19th century British boffin Charles Darwin formulated his theory of natural selection after visiting Ecuador's Galapagos Islands but on this evidence it is British tennis that is threatened with extinction after coming off second best so far against a team that former British captain David Lloyd said could be beaten on grass by "the blind school".

What's more, they must do it without British number two Greg Rusedski, who was earlier forced out of the doubles and the rest of the tie with tendinitis in his right foot's withdrawal meant a late call-up for 22-year-old British number three Parmar.

He started confidently enough with consecutive aces in a love service game but by then the damage had been done.

Henman losing his serve as Ecuador charged into a 3-0 lead.

World number 11 Nicolas, who defeated Rusedski in the first singles on Friday, was clearly enjoying himself, playing a cheeky backhand through his legs and then blowing a kiss to the small but noisy band of supporters on court.

And he served out for the set 6-3 in 38 minutes to put his side firmly in the driving seat.

There was a depressing air of inevitability about the way Henman lost his serve to love on a double fault in the third game of the next.

With Giovanni, just 17 and with a singles world ranking of 959, playing well above himself, Ecuador also took the second set 7-5 with Parmar's serve this time broken in the 11th game.

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Newcombe to be replaced next month

BRISBANE, July 16: The successor to John Newcombe as captain of Australia's Davis Cup tennis team will be known before the US Open later next month, Tennis Australia (TA) President Geoff Pollard said here Sunday, reports AFP.

There are four candidates for the post -- John Fitzgerald, Geoff Masters, Wally Masur and Peter McNamara.

Newcombe and coach Tony Roche have been in charge of Australia's team for seven years and are standing down after the Davis Cup final against either Spain or the United States in December.

"We are having a meeting in a fortnight and we will be speaking with the candidates either personally or by phone and we will certainly have an announcement before the US Open," said Pollard.

The new captain will be in place to comment on next year's (Davis Cup) draw when it is done in the middle weekend of the US Open.

Pollard said TA had started off with an optimistic timetable last April.

"In the end I didn't see a need to have next year's captain in place while this year's campaign is going so successfully."

Pollard said he had spoken to all the candidates, the players, Newcombe and Roche and had relayed the information to the selection committee.

Former Davis Cup player John Fitzgerald is the popular choice among the pundits to take over from Newcombe.

Jens, Peter reach Hall of Fame final

NEWPORT, Rhode Island, July 16: Germany's Jens Knippschild upset fifth-seeded Jason Stoltenberg of Australia 6-3, 6-4 in the semifinals of the Hall of Fame tennis championship Saturday to reach his first pro tournament final, reports Reuters.

Knippschild will be facing another unseeded player, Dutchman Peter Wessels, in the battle for the 49,500 dollars first prize today. Wessels ousted seventh-seeded Wayne Arthurs of Australia 7-6 (8-6), 6-7 (7-9), 6-4.

Played on an overcast day with swirling winds a major factor, Knippschild finally clinched victory on his third match point by putting away a volley at the net. He came from 0-30 behind in the final game.

Knippschild, 25, and ranked 173 in the world was playing in a clay court tournament in Ulm, Germany before flying here a week ago to play this grass court event.

"I feel more comfortable on clay," he admitted. "But after today maybe I should play more on grass even though the wind was difficult. Sometimes, I had no idea where the ball was going."

Stoltenberg, playing solid tennis all week until his battle with the winds Saturday, had 10 break point opportunities in the match but failed to cash in on one.

"I always felt if I could break once I had a chance to win," said Stoltenberg. "I sure had my chances but he served very well and it just wasn't meant to be for me."

Wessels held one match point in the second set at 7-6 in the tiebreaker, but Arthurs managed to escape to prolong the match.

In a battle of big serves, Wessels, ranked only 160, got his needed service break in the first game of the third set.

"I made the Olympic team!" I made the Olympic team!" crowed an ebullient Greene after he recovered from a mistake at the start to win the 100m final in 10.01sec. Johnson was second on 10.066 and Drummond third in 10.07.

Brian Lewis, who beat Greene in Helsinki last month, had the heartbreak berth, finishing fourth and out of the Olympic running in 10.09.

"I just felt great," Greene said. "I came here to win the 100m and 200m, and the first half is over."

"I just want to know why I can't have a final without stumbling," said Greene, whose blocks slipped in Helsinki when he lost to Lewis. "But I've been in enough races now that if I make a mistake in the beginning, I can stay calm."

In contrast, Jones made a picture-perfect start to her 100m, overtaking reigning Olympic champion Gail Devers at the 50m mark and winning easily in 10.88.

Devers, only the second woman to win consecutive 100m Olympic titles, faded, leaving Inger Miller and Chryste Gaines to finish second and third.

"Crossing the finish line, I couldn't have known how emotional it would be," said Jones, who held her arms aloft and beamed as she crossed the line.

Although Jones has hampered home her desire to win five gold medals in Sydney for more than a year, the fact that she is now bound for Australia

was slow to sink in. "I don't think it has hit me yet," she said. "It's the culmination of a lot of hard work, and now I'm on this team."

She'll be joined in Sydney by her husband, shot put world champion CJ Hunter, who finished second in a tightly-contested final won by Adam Nelson with a throw of 22.12m -- best in the world this year.

Jones found her expected victory unexpectedly emotional, but Miller and Gaines considered their performances a vindication.

Miller, eager to disprove critics who say her 200m world title would never have come had Jones been healthy enough to run that final, was clearly smarting over Michael Johnson's published comments doubting her commitment and focus.

That dig drew a guffaw from Greene, who has himself been stung by the remarks of his 200m rival.

"What can I say? Maybe he'd get some sense if he did," Greene laughed as his manager gestured to him to keep quiet.

Miller, who has at times appeared irked by the attention focused on Jones and her five-gold campaign, said she had no quarrel with Jones' ambitions -- nor any desire to assist them.

"She wants five gold medals."

Maurice Greene celebrates after winning the men's 100-metre race in the US Olympic team's trials at the California University on July 15. — AFP photo

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TAKE THAT: Lennox Lewis of Great Britain lands a jab on South African Francois Botha during their World Heavyweight Championship fight at Docklands Arena in London on July 15. Lewis won on a second round knockout. — AFP photo

Lennox leaves no doubts

LONDON, July 16: Britain's Lennox Lewis successfully defended both his WBC and IBF world heavy weight titles here Saturday when referee Larry O'Connell stopped his fight with South African challenger Francois Botha in Round Two, reports AFP.

O'Connell intervened after a clinical Lewis combination had put Botha down and almost out of the ring. The South African regained his feet but the British official felt he was unable to continue.

Lewis rose to 37-1 with one draw after the knockout at the London Arena.

The 34-year-old London-born Lewis was the holder of all three heavyweight belts but was stripped of his WBA title by a New York judge after refusing to fight their number one contender Henry Akwande.

Lewis said he knew from the moment he was putting his gloves on that things would work out well in his eighth world title defence.

Lewis said: "I felt good. I felt great in the dressing room. I wanted to come out here and do what comes naturally."

Lewis, who was born in east London but left for Canada at the age of 12, was untroubled by the big-talking Botha, who failed to ask questions of the defending champion.

"I'm not here to take punches. I'm here to give out punches," said an exuberant Lewis.

After the fight Lewis was asked if he had a message for American former undisputed world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, who Lewis has said is his ultimate target before retirement.

Tyson, after beating compatriot Lou Savarese in 38 seconds in Glasgow last month, raised his arms high above his opponent as the pair stood face to face in the centre of the ring for the final introduction.

Lewis connected first, aright hand pushing Botha back towards a neutral corner, but the South African, who had out-classed Tyson for four rounds in January last year before walking into a sucker punch, was adamant he was not just here to pick up a final payday.

Lewis immediately brought up a swelling around Botha's

left eye as he walked forward into Botha and connected with another right hand to the top of his opponent's head.

Another clattering right, this time a short one, clearly wobbled Botha's knees. But Britain's world champion was not the type to get careless.

Instead he bided his time, happy to wait for the right moment to pounce, as the bell ended round one.

Botha hurled a wild right hand at the start of round two but Lewis shrugged it off and continued to prowl forwards, throwing his punches sparingly but decisively.

Botha then enjoyed his first moment of success when he landed a right jab to Lewis' body, yet he remained on the back foot.

The end came when Lewis softened up Botha with a right-left combination before sending the challenger sprawling over the ropes with a follow-up right.

The South African clambered to his feet but O'Connell waved the contest off after two minutes 39 seconds of the second round.

Botha admitted: "He caught me with a great shot. He is a big man. Give him all the credit -- he can hurt any fighter."

But he refused to be drawn on who would win a Tyson-Lewis showdown, saying: "It would be an interesting fight."

Evander Holyfield, who Lewis beat to take the undisputed belt, is preparing to fight with John Ruiz for the vacant WBA crown taken from Lewis by judges.

But as far as the boxing world is concerned, Lewis, who is next likely to face New Zealand David Tua, remains the undisputed champion before that matter is resolved -- and whoever wins that fight -- is clearly still the top dog in the heavyweight division.

Greene, Jones going to Sydney

SACRAMENTO, California, July 16: At last, United States sprint superstars Maurice Greene and Marion Jones are officially headed for the Olympics, reports AFP.

Greene, holder of the men's 100m world record, erased the bitter memory of his failure to qualify for the 1996 Games with a 100m victory Saturday at the US Olympic Athletics Trials.

Even sweeter, he was joined by his HSI clubmates Curtis Johnson and John Drummond, who finished second and third, separated by only four-hundredths of a second.

"I made the Olympic team!" I made the Olympic team!" crowed an ebullient Greene after he recovered from a mistake at the start to win the 100m final in 10.01sec. Johnson was second on 10.066 and Drummond third in 10.07.

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