

Hingis, Clijsters to fight it out

FILDERSTADT, Germany, Oct 7: Martina Hingis claimed a stunning 6-1, 6-0 victory over Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario on Saturday to reach the final of the Porsche Open tennis tournament, reports AFP.

Top-seeded Hingis took just 30 minutes to overwhelm her fourth-seeded opponent, and will now face 17-year-old Kim Clijsters of Belgium in a play-off for the title.

Unseeded Clijsters, who practised for the match by hitting with boyfriend Levent Hewitt, overcame third seed Nathalie Tauziat of France 3-6, 6-4, 6-1.

Hingis challenged Sanchez-Vicario right from the start by striking the ball more positively, and also caught her opponent several times by executing some widely-angled short balls that left the Spaniard stranded on the baseline.

The breakthrough came in the fourth game, when Hingis struck a forehand winner to lead 3-1. Sanchez-Vicario was infuriated when she believed a ball during that rally had landed beyond the baseline, and fired a ball at the linesman after losing the point.

Hingis then held to love, and in the next game Sanchez-Vicario double-faulted and then miss-hit a forehand that barely left her racket to fall behind 5-1. In the second set, the dispirited Spaniard earned just eight points.

She double-faulted to lose her first two service games, and put a backhand long to go down 5-0.

"The court is fast and she takes the ball on the rise, and everything was going too fast and I made too many errors," said Sanchez-Vicario. "I wasn't serving well and I didn't play deep enough either. The only thing that was working was my slice. I tried to come to the net but then I would miss easy volleys, so nothing today was really on my side."

Sanchez-Vicario slumped to her biggest defeat since losing by the same score to Mary Pierce in the Hilton Head final in April, and lost to Hingis for the 15th straight time. The last time she even got a set was at Wimbledon in 1998.

Hingis last won by such a convincing score when she dismissed Monica Seles 6-0, 6-0 last March in Miami.

"She's not a very powerful player, but she always hits very well the corners," said Sanchez-Vicario. "Every match has been different, but she likes to play against me."

Clijsters will be chasing her second title of the year after winning Hobart in January. She outlasted Tauziat to claim her third win in four meetings against her, but the first two sets were strewn with errors.

Tauziat claimed the opening set by snatching the last three games, and fortunes swung back and forth in the second with Clijsters leading 4-1 and being pulled back to 4-4 before Tauziat double-faulted to drop the set.

In the decider, Clijsters was broken in the first game but then ran through the next six, dropping just seven points and claiming the last nine.

In the first and second sets I didn't make her move enough, and in the third I made her run a little bit more," Clijsters said. "I was a bit tired so I knew that I was tired, so I tried to run her around. I placed my serve well and my return well and it worked."

On facing Hingis she said: "She's a great player and is playing unbelievable at the moment and it's going to be really tough. I'm just going out there to enjoy it and have fun. For sure, she's number one in the world and I've got nothing to lose."

Change in Chase

NEW YORK, Oct 7: The New York Knicks have pushed the doubles final of the Chase Championships, the season-ending event on the women's tennis tour, off the Madison Square Garden Court November 19, reports AP.

The doubles final, originally scheduled for Sunday, November 19, was moved to Saturday, November 18 and will follow the singles semifinal matches.

The Knicks have a home game against Golden State on that Sunday night.

The singles final will be played Sunday afternoon.

The high-profile women's tournament is leaving the Garden after 29 years and will be played in Munich, Germany, starting next year.

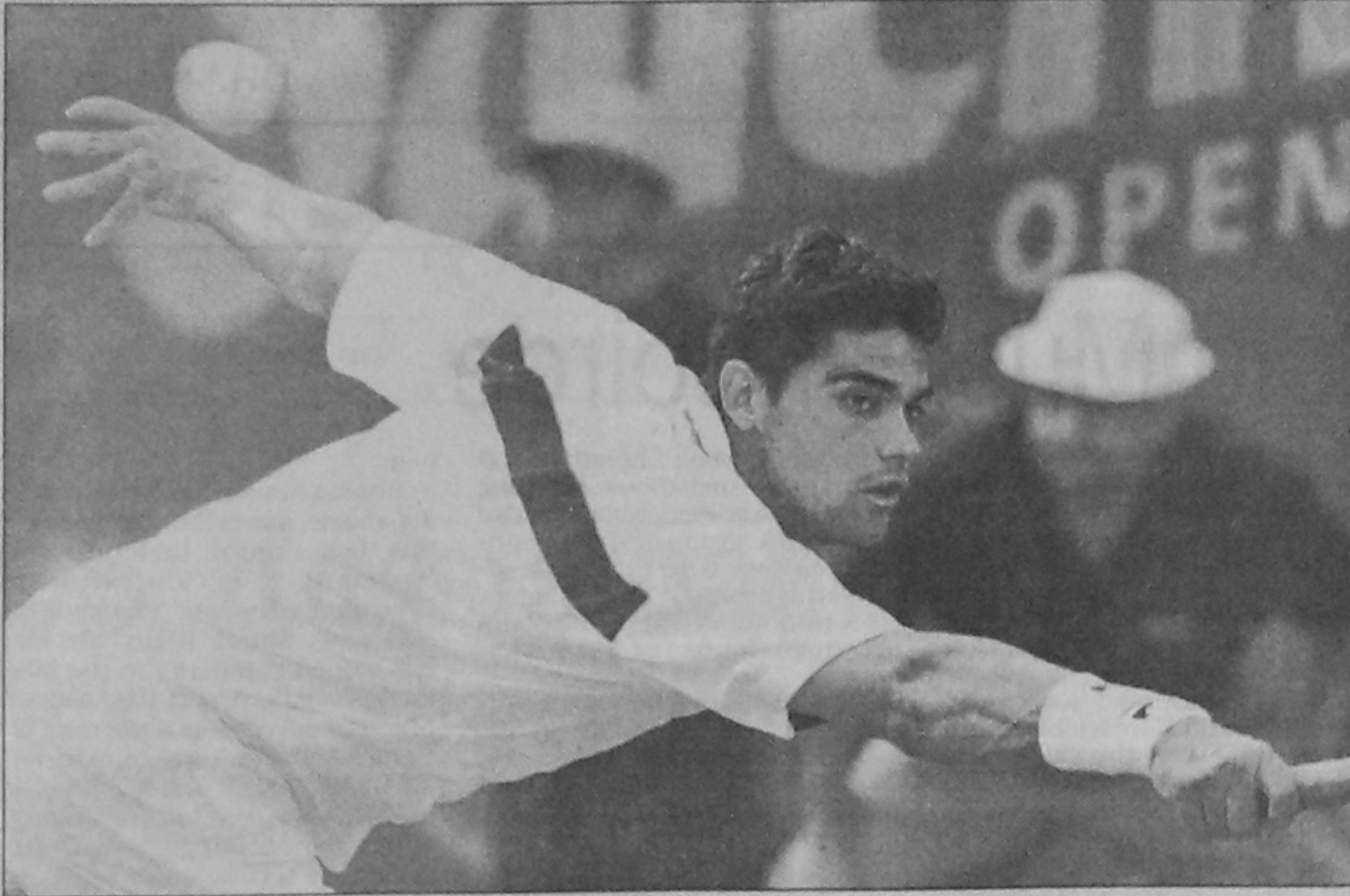
Monty marches on

WENTWORTH, England, Oct 7: Colin Montgomerie broke one record and equalled another as he began the defence of his World Match Play title with a sparkling victory over Ryder Cup team-mate Padraig Harrington in the 1.4-million-dollar event at Wentworth on Friday, reports AFP.

Montgomerie, winner of the last three PGA championships on the course as well, had an eagle and nine birdies in a morning 61 which lowered the tournament record by one.

Eleven under par at lunch, the 37-year-old Scot then had another five birdies - and one bogey - as he crushed Harrington for the second year running, this time by five and three.

The Dubliner was hammered 7 and 6 at the semi-final stage 12 months ago. Only two under par for those 30 holes, he improved nine strokes on that Friday, but it was still not enough.



Australian Mark Philippoussis stretches for the ball during his Hong Kong Open semifinal against compatriot Pat Rafter yesterday. - AFP photo

Patrick Scudded

HONG KONG, Oct 7: Mark Philippoussis rained down 14 aces - including one on match point - to claim victory Saturday in an all-Australian semifinal at the 375,000-dollar Hong Kong Open over Patrick Rafter 7-6, 6-4, reports AFP.

The seventh seed from Melbourne was dominant in his one-hour, 36-minute defeat of the popular two-time finalist.

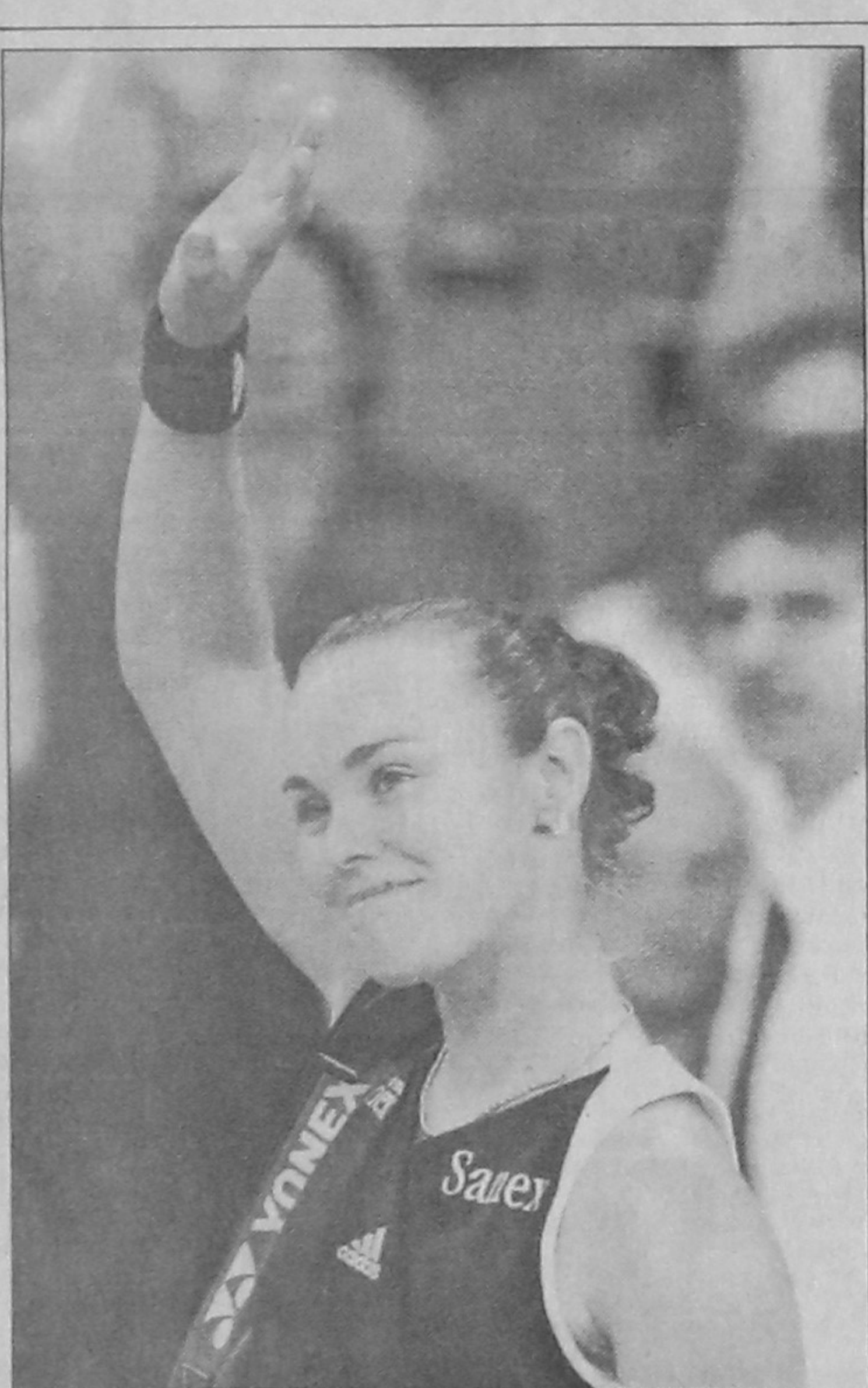
Philippoussis will on Sunday face German third seed Nicolas Kiefer, who knocked out Briton Tim Henman 6-2, 6-4 in a clinical display at Victoria Park.

Philippoussis and Kiefer both claimed their only titles of the season last February, the Australian in San Jose and Kiefer winning Dubai.

Rafter, a two-time US Open champion, had won all three of his previous meetings against his former Davis Cup team-mate.

But the loser said that he felt the effects of a series of draining matches earlier in the week.

"I was flat and a little tired," said the popular 27-year-old. "You've got to be sharp against Mark and I wasn't. He had big shots at the right time."



Swiss star Martina Hingis waves to supporters after her semifinal victory over Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario at the Porsche Open in Filderstadt, Germany yesterday. - AFP photo

Quickest Schumacher

SUZUKA, Japan, Oct 7: Michael Schumacher qualified quickest for the Japanese Grand Prix for the third consecutive year on Saturday, reports AFP.

It was the Ferrari driver's eighth pole of the season and the 31st of his career. Never one to relax until he is standing on the winner's podium listening to the German national anthem, Schumacher was quick to play down the significance of starting at the front.

"It is nice but it is not something special to celebrate," he said after squeezing defending champion Mika Hakkinen to McLaren into the second spot by nine-thousandths of a second.

"We have come here to try to win the race and to win the world championship and this is a first step. But it is not done yet. There is a long way to go."

Schumacher, who has an eight-point lead over nearest rival Hakkinen with two races remaining, needs only two points in Suzuka to become Ferrari's first world champion since 1979.

Two years ago in Japan Schumacher won pole position

An optimistic Rafter added that he was pleased with his Hong Kong effort.

"It's amazing how hard work pays off," he said of his last few weeks before and during the Sydney Games.

Rafter lost finals here in 1994 and 1997 to Michael Chang, whom Henman put out in the quarterfinals Friday night.

The second-seeded Briton said his previous exertions may have contributed to his own defeat against the fresher Kiefer.

"I struggled, all credit to Kiefer," said Henman. "He served well on the big points. I don't think I got a look-in on his serve at all. I can't have many regrets, he just played better. I was a step slower today, maybe due to my match last night."

Henman said he will leave Hong Kong for the start of the European indoor season in Vienna next week with more confidence.

"I have three wins under my belt, that's good for the indoor season."

The Briton's quest for an end to his two-year title drought now continues. Since winning a trophy in Autumn, 1998 in Basel, he has

lost in seven consecutive finals, the last in Cincinnati against Swede Thomas Enqvist in August.

Henman got off to a poor start and never recovered against the third seed.

Kiefer prevailed in 90 minutes as he pounced on Henman, forcing the Briton to errors and breaking him once in the first set and twice in the forgettable second.

Kiefer hopes he began a German victory chain-reaction on this weekend featuring the Germany-England World Cup qualifier which closes down Wimbledon Stadium, and Michael Schumacher's chance to clinch the Formula One championship with a win at Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix.

"It could be a big weekend," said Kiefer. "Today, Kiefer-Henman, Kiefer wins. Of course, Germany will win the football. And Schumi has big chances as well."

No transfer proposal yet

ZURICH, Oct 7 (Reuters): World and European soccer officials failed on Friday to produce a comprehensive proposal for a new player transfer system.

A Transfer Task Force set up by world body FIFA and its European counterpart UEFA said it had yet to finalise its stance regarding players aged over 23.

But the task force did formulate plans to ban transfers for players under 18 and set up a compensation system that reimburses clubs who bring through young players but lose them to other teams before the age of 23.

The European Commission (EC) has given football until the end of the month to come up with ideas on how to change the current transfer set-up.

It believes the system, whereby clubs can demand a transfer fee for any player who leaves before his contract is up, breaks European laws on free competition and workers' freedom of movement.

The task force, which also includes representatives from national football associations, leagues, clubs and players, will meet again on October 12 in Zurich to see if it can reach agreement regarding players aged over 23.

The task force's Norwegian chairman Per Ravn Omdal, a UEFA vice-president and FIFA executive committee member, said all sides were eager to come up with a joint position and that talks so far had been constructive.

"I am confident we shall reach something which is beneficial to the game," he said.

Blatter said he and UEFA President Lennart Johansson had also agreed to start lobbying European Union heads of state to see if they could persuade them to make the EU treat athletes like other entertainers such as opera singers or actors.

but stalled on the grid and was forced to start last.

He roared back into third position but an exploded right rear tyre ended his race. Hakkinen won and took the title.

In 1999 Schumacher had pole again but managed only

since 1987 only four men have won the race after starting in pole. Schumacher did it in 1995. Ayrton Senna in 1988 and Gerhard Berger in 1987 and 1991.

"It is the best starting position for the race, of course, but it is not everything. We have to make a good start and we (Ferrari) have not always made a habit of having good starts here," Schumacher said.

Hakkinen, who missed out on pole after a titanic duel through a thrilling hour of qualifying, admitted he was disappointed.

"But I enjoyed it. It was very exciting to take part in that session and although I feel I could have taken pole I am happy to be at the front of the grid."

"I tried to go faster on my last lap at the end but I just could not find the traction I needed coming out of the chicane."

Hakkinen's McLaren team mate David Coulthard was third fastest to claim what he described as "the best seat in the house for the world title decider".

Ferrari's Rubens Barrichello was fourth.

MICHAEL SCHUMACHER

second place behind the Finn who lifted the drivers' title for a second consecutive year.

In the 13 Japanese Grand Prix held at the Suzuka circuit

Martina, the \$2m woman

FILDERSTADT, Germany, Oct 7: Martina Hingis on Wednesday passed the 2-million-dollar mark in prize money this year when she qualified for the quarterfinals in singles and doubles at the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix, reports AP.

Even if she loses her next matches (the quarterfinal and onwards), Hingis is guaranteed a paycheck of 13,250 dollars, which brings her yearly earnings to 2,008,734 dollars. Hingis passes Lindsay Davenport, who withdrew this week for the Toyota Princess Cup in Tokyo, for second place on the prize money leaders.

Venus Williams, who also is not playing this week, leads all players with 2,030,650 dollars.

Hingis has been the WTA Tour's prize money leader for the last three years.

Agassi to play at Bercy meet

PARIS, Oct 7: Andre Agassi will defend his Paris Tennis Masters Series title at Bercy on November 13-19, tournament organisers said on Friday, reports Xinhua.

Australian Open champion Agassi has not won a Masters Series event this year.

He will be joined among the 38 direct entries by French Open holder Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil, second-placed US Open champion Marat Safin of Russia and fellow American Pete Sampras, the Wimbledon champion.

Young Briton banned for doping

LONDON, Oct 7: Mark Findlay, one of Britain's most promising young sprinters, has been banned here Friday for two years after testing positive for a banned steroid, reports AFP.

Findlay, a 22-year-old Londoner who has competed internationally at Under-23 level in the 100 metres and 200m for Britain, gave a sample which contained the anabolic steroid stanozolol on July 27.

The Blackheath Harrier has told UK Athletics that he has recently changed his medication for an unnamed long-term medical condition.

He has accepted the automatic two-year ban, which rules him out of competition until August 29, 2002, but may apply to the International Amateur Athletic Federation for early reinstatement due to exceptional circumstances.

A spokesman for UK Athletics said: "Mark has admitted that he recently changed the medication he was taking for a medical condition. He has also admitted that this medication contained the drug identified within the sample."

"Unfortunately Mark had not checked the medication prescribed did not contain any prohibited substances. An automatic ban has been imposed from August 29, 2000."

Findlay came fifth in a 100m invitation race in the British Grand Prix at Crystal Palace in August, running 10.37 seconds in a contest won by Britain's World Junior Games hopeful Mark Lewis-Francis in 10.10secs.

Europe leading in Solheim Cup

LOCH LOMOND, Scotland, Oct 7: Europe resisted an American fightback to claim a three-point lead on Friday after the first day of the Solheim Cup, the women's version of the Ryder Cup, reports AFP.

Dale Reid's side had created history with a first-ever white-wash in the morning foursomes and a commanding 4-0 lead in the biennial event.

But for much of the afternoon that hard-earned advantage appeared to be slipping away as Pat Bradley's United States team threatened to close the gap to just half a point.

Laura Davies and Alison Nicholas were thrashed 6 and 5 in the first match of the afternoon to set the tone and although Trish Johnson and Sophie Gustafson earned a half, Swedish pair Helen Alfredsson and Liselotte Neumann - the only change from the morning - lost to Kelly Robbins and Pat Hurst.

That made the final match on the course vitally important and it should have been a comfortable win for Europe with Scot Janice Moodie and Sweden's Annika Sorenstam three up after 10 holes.

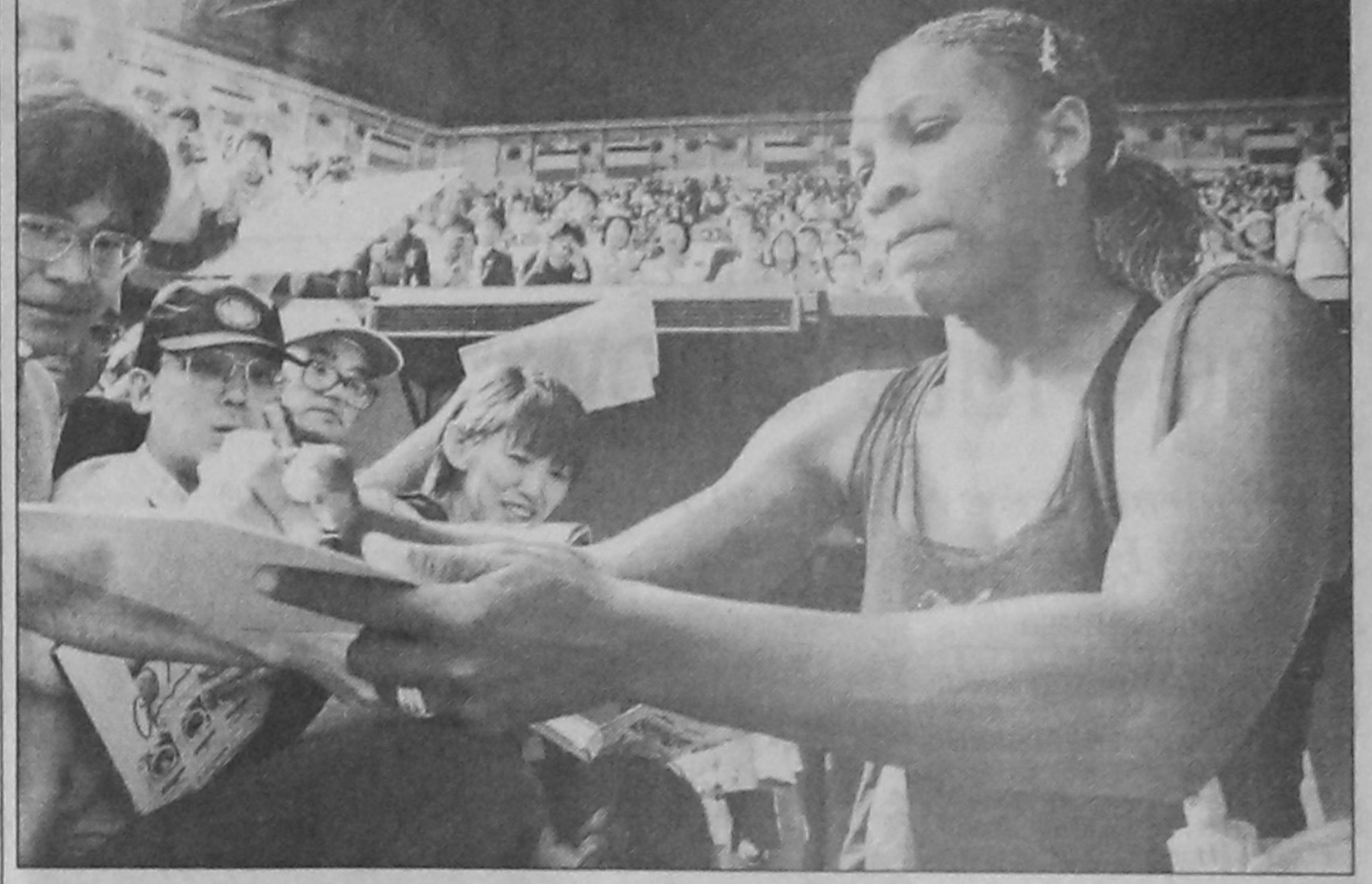
They looked good to go four up on the 11th as well, on the par-three green in one and with their opponents in a bunker, but somehow the home pair contrived to take four putts to get down.

Clearly inspired, the Americans then birdied five of the next six holes and the home pair needed three birdies of their own to go down the 18th all square.

As with the 11th they found the green in regulation and after Meg Mallon and Beth Daniel could only manage a five, had two putts for the match.

Moodie coaxed the ball to the hole side to seal the win and two points out of two for the Edinburgh golfer making her Solheim debut.

Europe therefore ended the day with 5 1/2 points, the United States 2 1/2 with six points to play for on Saturday in the six fourball matches.



American Serena Williams obliging autograph hunters after winning her semifinal game against Czech Daja Bedanova at the Princess Cup in Tokyo yesterday. - AFP photo

Serena clips Daja's wings

TOKYO, Oct 7: Serena Williams put an end to qualifier Daja Bedanova's seed-killing run on Saturday as she secured a final berth at the WTA Princess Cup tennis tournament, reports AFP.

Fresh from winning the Sydney Olympic doubles gold medal with her sister Venus, the American second seed powered her way through to a 6-1, 6-4 victory over the 17-year-old Czech.

In the final, the 1999 US Open champion will take on France's Julie Halard-Decugis, the winner over former world number one and top seed Monica Seles, who abandoned the match at 6-4, 4-3 with a foot problem.

"Honestly the whole match I couldn't get my first serve in," said Williams, who called her sister at home Saturday morning and asked about Bedanova's play as Venus defeated her at Philadelphia a year ago.

"I was really having problems with my serve. I think if I had served better, then it would have been a totally different outcome. I was just hanging in there with my ground strokes," said Williams.

Although Williams got her

first serve in only 48 per cent of the time in the 81-minute match, she strongly took six games in a row after Bedanova held her serve in the opening game to love.

Bedanova, ranked 87th against Williams' eighth, capitalised at a 30-40 break chance at 1-3 in the fifth game of the second set and another in the seventh to take a 4-3 lead.

But that was all she could do as Williams hit a couple of lightning service return winners to break the following game and went on to win the next two games to clinch the victory.

"In the second set, I had some chances. I was 4-3 up with a break. Unfortunately I couldn't make it. But it was a good match, said the German-based Bedanova.

It was Bedanova's first-ever semifinal appearance on the WTA tour. She beat 1999 Australian Open finalist Amelie Mauresmo of France and American fifth seed Amy Frazier on her way to the last four.

Seles said she had started to feel pain in both feet. The injury was described as "inflammation of the tendons on the front of the foot" by a WTA tour doctor.

"Right now, my main focus is just to get the pain away, because it's making me very grumpy," said Seles, a five-time champion here.



Frenchwoman Julie Halard-Decugis makes a backhand return against American Monica Seles during their semifinal clash of the Princess Cup in Tokyo yesterday. Seles, however, withdrew from the match with a foot problem in the second set. - AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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R J X X D R R P J K P W C E G F R
C D S R W M S K W M D G D
V S R S M W T D C S E J M F R E
Yesterday's Cryptquip: SHOULD YOU CROSS
A CAMEL AND A COW, I PREDICT YOU'LL END
UP WITH A DROMEDARY.
Today's Cryptquip Clue: R equals S

The Cryptquip 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.