

Perkins calls it a day

BRISBANE, Oct 9: Kierean Perkins denied a third successive 1500m swimming gold medal at the Sydney Olympics by fellow Australian Grant Hackett, called it quits today, reports AFP.

"I haven't officially announced my retirement, but this is it," the 28-year-old said at a ticker-tape parade for Australian Olympic stars in Brisbane.

"There is no doubt Grant is capable of great things. He proved that by winning the final in Sydney ahead of the world's best field in the 1500 metres."

Perkins swam his fastest time in six years, slashing three seconds off his gold-winning Atlanta performance to win the silver after qualifying fastest in the heats at the Sydney Games.

But he could not raise his performance again in the final won by Hackett, who is unbeaten over 1500 metres freestyle since 1997.

"Nobody likes getting silver and it would have been a great achievement to get the gold, but I have had the chance to sit back and take it in and my swim was three seconds under Atlanta, so I have to be happy with that," Perkins said.

Perkins, Olympic champion in Barcelona in 1992 and Atlanta in 1996, said he was planning a holiday with his wife, Sam, and two young children before taking on sponsorship commitments.

"She's certainly relieved that the burden of the pressure of competition has been lifted for now," he said.

"She's certainly been a driving force behind my preparation for the last four years. I have no doubt in my mind that I couldn't have done it without her."

Perkins' world record of 14 minutes 41.66 seconds set at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, still stands.

Seeds sail smoothly

ZURICH, Oct 9: All the seeds in action on the opening day advanced safely into the second round of the 1.08-million-dollar WTA event here on Sunday, reports AFP.

Fifth seed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa eased past Spain's Magui Serna 6-4, 6-1, but seventh seeded American Chanda Rubin had to rally to overcome Croatia's Sijlvija Talaja 2-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Although seeded eighth, Russia's Elena Dementieva has been one of the hottest players on the WTA Tour in the last month after winning a silver medal at the Sydney Olympics and reaching the semi-finals of the US Open.

On Sunday she reached the second round over a 6-3, 6-3 win over Ruxandra Dragomir of Romania.

Although Serna saved 10 break points in the first set, Coetzer took three games in a row to lead 4-2, and then surrendered just four points in the final four games of the second.

While she had a straightforward victory, Rubin's match swung wildly from one player to the other. Talaja took the opening set by snatching the last four games, but after holding serve in the first game of the next set she gave up the next nine games as Rubin levelled the match and took a commanding lead in the deciding set.

Dementieva struggled to get the better of a persistent Dragomir, saving three break points in the first set and seven in the second. The Russian also made more unforced errors than her opponent, but compensated with 12 forehand winners and five off the backhand, while Dragomir could manage a total of only three.

Martina Hingis tops the seedings while Lindsay Davenport makes an early return from the injury that sidelined her at the Olympics. The field also includes Nathalie Tauziat, Jennifer Capriati, Anna Kournikova and Jelena Dokic.

MU under scrutiny

LONDON, Oct 9: The English Football League is to look into allegations that it offered Oxford United money to fix the venue of a league cup match in 1983, the Sunday Mirror reported, says AFP.

Jim Smith, now coach of Derby County, alleges in a book to be published later this month, that then United chairman Martin Edwards and former coach Ron Atkinson had approached him and offered 6,000 pounds (9,000 dollars) if Oxford would play a second replay at Old Trafford.

Under the competition rules a second replay venue had to be decided on the toss of a coin - unless the two teams made a separate agreement with Football League approval.

"There had been a suggestion that it would be better for us financially if we agreed to play a second replay at Old Trafford," Smith said.

But our chairman, Robert Maxwell, was having none of it. They begged us to play the third match back at Old Trafford and they offered to put 6,000 into our players' pool which I'm sure would have delighted one or two of our boys.

"In those days that was a massive amount of money on offer. I was very surprised by the offer, it was unusual and probably not altogether legal. But I told them my chairman was determined to leave it to the toss of a coin," Smith said.



RAMPANT ROMARIO: Brazilian superstriker Romario (L), who struck four times, here shoots in his second against Venezuela during their World Cup qualifier at Venezuela on October 8. —AFP photo

Romario runs riot

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct 9 (Reuters/Internet) - Veteran striker Romario, who hit a hatrick last month on his first international outing in over two years, scored another four goals on Sunday as Brazil thrashed Venezuela 6-0 away in a World Cup qualifier.

Argentina beat arch-rivals Uruguay 2-1 in a fiercely contested River Plate derby while Ecuador kept up their hopes of a first-ever World Cup appearance by winning a pulsating encounter against Chile in Quito.

Peru continued to struggle despite replacing coach Francisco Maturana with Julio Cesar Uribe last month as they lost 1-0 to lowly Bolivia in La Paz.

The weekend's games, which began Saturday with Paraguay

overcoming Colombia 2-0 in Bogota, brought the marathon South American campaign to the halfway mark.

The ten countries play each other twice with the top four qualifying for Japan and South Korea and the fifth playing off against the winners of the Oceania Group.

Argentina are clear leaders with 22 points from five games, followed by Brazil and Paraguay, who have 17 each. Colombia on 15, Uruguay on 14 and Ecuador on 13. The race for World Cup places now appears to lie between these six.

Chile's defeat left them as rank outsiders with 10 points, while Peru and Bolivia, with eight, and Venezuela with three have little more than a mathematical chance.

BRAZIL-VENEZUELA The irrepressible Romario, leading scorer with seven goals

despite having played only two games, hit a first half hatrick in eight minutes in Maracaibo, then completed Brazil's scoring with another goal midway through the second half.

His form has left millions of Brazilians wondering why former coach Wanderley Luxemburgo, sacked last month, refused to pick him for the team for so long.

"As long as I get the chance, I will keep on scoring goals," said the 34-year-old Vasco da Gama striker, who led Brazil to World Cup victory in 1994.

Brazil, due to name a new coach this week, were playing under interim coach Candinho, Luxemburgo having been given his marching orders last week following a dismal two-year reign which left the national team in chaos.

Debutant Euler and midfielder Juninho Paulista scored Brazil's first two goals in a curious game. The first 20 minutes had been even, with the home fans even chanting "ole" as Venezuela knocked the ball about before collapsing and conceding five goals in 18 minutes.

ARGENTINA-URUGUAY

In Buenos Aires, former Argentina captain and coach Daniel Passarella faced his own country for the first time since taking charge of neighbours Uruguay last year.

The game, predictably, was passionate but short on good football.

First half goals by Marcelo Gallardo, later taken off injured, and Gabriel Batistuta put Argentina in control but a close-range effort by Federico Magallanes three minutes after the break set up a tense second half.

It was Argentina's first home win against Uruguay since 1978 - ironically, the year that Passarella led them to World Cup victory in the same River Plate stadium.

CHILE-ECUADOR

A 76th minute goal by Agustín Delgado, his fourth of the qualifiers, gave Ecuador a well-earned win over Chile at high altitude in Quito where they have taken 13 out of a possible 15 points.

In a match full of enterprising football, particularly from Ecuador captain Alex Aguinaga, Chile nearly snatched a late equaliser but substitute Sebastian Rosenthal's shot was brilliantly saved by Jose Cevallos.

PERU-BOLIVIA

The group's two lowest scoring teams met in La Paz, where predictably a single goal was enough to decide the outcome. It was scored by Bolivia's Roger Suarez in the fourth minute, pulling them level with opponents Peru on eight points.



Trinidad and Tobago's Nigel Pierre (R) is under pressure from Mexican Duilio Davino during their World Cup clash at Mexico on October 8. —AFP photo

CONCACAF Group

Honduras progress

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct 9: Honduras beat Jamaica 1-0 to reach the last six of the CONCACAF World Cup qualifying tournament on Sunday while Mexico scored seven goals for the second successive game, reports Reuters.

A goal by substitute Danilo Turcios on the stroke of half-time ensured that Honduras would finish in the top two of semifinal Group D and go into the six-team final stage.

Jamaica had already qualified before Sunday's clash in Tegucigalpa. Both teams played for more than an hour with ten men after Honduras' Reinaldo Clavesquin and Jamaica's Onandi Lowe were sent off for fighting in the 24th minute.

The group's other match saw El Salvador snatch an ultimately meaningless last-minute win away to St Vincent, depriving the Caribbean minnows of their first point in the group.

Vladimir Cubias' long range effort in the 89th minute to give the Central Americans a 2-1 win in Kingston, to the dismay of 1500 fans who ten minutes earlier had seen Marlon James equalise.

St Vincent coach Lennie Taylor was angry with over-seas-based players who refused to play on Sunday.

At Mexico City, national side debutant Jared Borgetti slammed home three goals leading Mexico to a 7-0 thrashing of Trinidad & Tobago in Group C.

The match, played in a half-empty Aztec Stadium, was also the official debut of Mexico's new head coach Enrique Meza, who took over the squad's helm last month after Manuel Lapuente stepped down following a series of lacklustre results.

With both teams already qualified for the final round of the Concacaf tournament - from which three teams will qualify for the 2002 World Cup shared by South Korea and Japan - Sunday's game held

more significance for the Mexicans seeking revenge for their 1-0 upset loss to Trinidad in Port-of-Spain on July 23.

Trinidad showed up in Mexico City without several of its normal starters, including Manchester United star striker Dwight Yorke.

Borgetti, who plays for Mexican First Division side Santos Laguna and is the league's top scorer, made an auspicious debut with the national team, striking goals through the porous Trinidad defence at the 26th, 30th and 71st minutes.

Cuauhtemoc Blanco of Spanish First Division side Valladolid struck with a close range header at 20th minute and from the penalty spot at the 28th. The scoring was rounded out by Duilio Davino at the 66th minute and Victor Ruiz in a 75th minute penalty after Blanco was chopped down in the box.

The win puts Mexico at the top of Group C on goal difference over Trinidad, with one match remaining.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

PARIS, Oct 9 (AFP): Results from Sunday night's Latin American (CONMEBOL) World Cup qualifiers: Maracaibo, Venezuela Venezuela 0 Brazil 6 (Euler 20, Juninho Paulista 28, Romario 31, 35, 38-pen, 63) La Paz Bolivia 1 (Suarez) Peru 0 Quito Ecuador 1 (Delgado 76) Chile 0 Buenos Aires Argentina 2 (Gallardo 27, Batistuta 41) Uruguay 1 (Magallanes 49)

Paes gets going

TOKYO, Oct 9: India's ace Leander Paes cleared the first hurdle beating Fredrik Jonsson of Sweden in a rain-delayed match on the opening day of the Japan Open tennis tournament on Monday, reports AFP.

Playing his first singles match after the Sydney Olympic Games, Paes had to wait for almost six hours before suddenly being called for the men's first round match to score a 7-6, 6-3 victory.

"That was the most difficult part today because of the rain delay. We didn't know when we are gonna go on. In fact, I was in the hotel when I heard my match as called," said Paes.

"I managed to come here quickly and there was only a 10-minute warm up and we just went to play. Maybe it should be rain-delayed every day, then I play better again," he added.

Paes never showed the ill-effects of the delay as he stood firm on his serves and never faced a single break point, while he hit an array of lightning forehand winners and a series of fine volley winners at the net.

"I served well today. I got a lot of good first serves in and hence my game was very aggressive. I was also able to hit a lot of second serves. I didn't hit one double fault today, not one," said Paes.

"The only difference in the first set was the tie-break. I managed to play a few good points, especially at five-all. I took a nice forehand approach winner and I was aggressive on it."

"It was really good, it was a lot of positive tennis for me today," added the 27-year-old from Calcutta, last year's Wimbledon and French Open doubles champion with his compatriot Mahesh Phupathi.

In the second round, Paes will take on either 16th seed Christophe Rochus of Belgium or Andrea Gaudenzi of Italy.

Top eight men's seeds and top two women's seeds received first-round byes in the 970,000-dollar hard court tournament.

Jonas Bjorkman of Sweden, 13th seed, had to save two break points in the final set to breaker to beat American Jeff Tarango 6-4, 3-6, 7-6.

Andre Agassi of Spain put Argentina in control but a close-range effort by Federico Magallanes three minutes after the break set up a tense second half.

Keegan fall-out

LONDON, Oct 8: Peter Beardsley and Arthur Cox resigned from England's coaching staff on Sunday following the departure of Kevin Keegan.

Keegan quit as coach following Saturday's 1-0 defeat against Germany at Wembley and Beardsley and Cox have followed suit.

Howard Wilkinson, who will take charge of the England team for Wednesday's second 2002 World Cup qualifier in four days, revealed former Manchester United assistant manager Brian Kidd and former international Stuart Pearce had been brought in to help prepare for the game in Finland.

Wilkinson, the Football Association's technical director, acted as caretaker manager when Keegan's predecessor, Glenn Hoddle, left the post.

"To find myself in the same position, so many similarities it is untrue," said the former Leeds United boss.

"But I have been here before and my task is simple. I have three days and two training sessions to pick a team, pick a way of playing and get a result."

Gosper quits IOC race

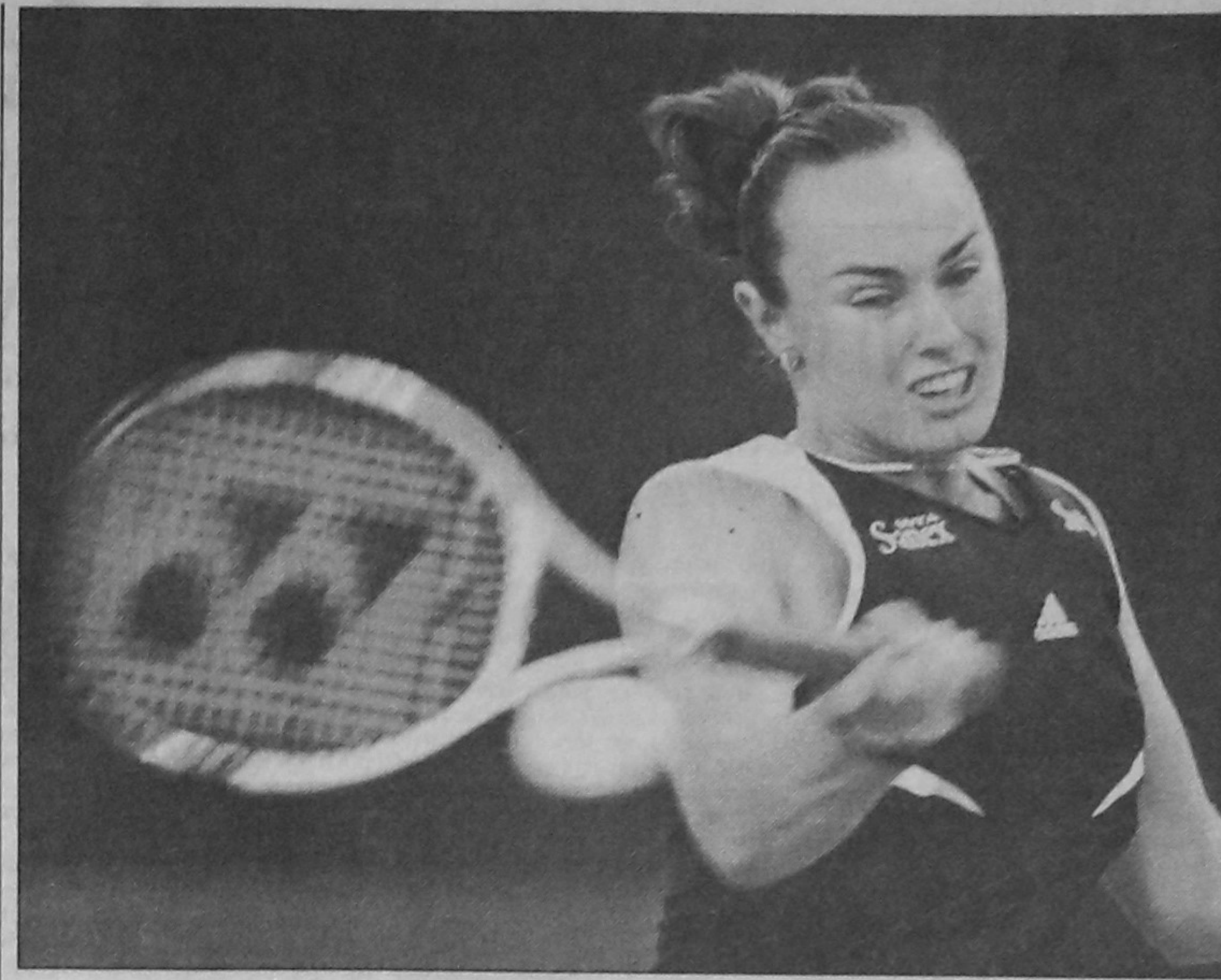
SYDNEY, Oct 9: International Olympic Committee (IOC) vice-president Kevan Gosper said on Monday he had withdrawn from the race to replace retiring president Juan Antonio Samaranch, reports Reuters.

"I go in a race if I think I can win. And I've certainly thought up until recently I could," Gosper told Australian Broadcasting Corp Radio on Monday.

"If you want something like the (IOC) presidency you have to want it very, very much."

"And I simply found at the end of the (Sydney) Games, I didn't want it that much."

Gosper, Australia's top Olympics official, has always been seen as a serious contender for the top IOC job once Samaranch steps down in July 2001.



Swiss superstar Martina Hingis plays forehand against Belgian Kim Clijsters during their Porsche Open final at Filderstadt in Germany on October 8. —AFP photo

Porsche only Hingis'

FILDERSTADT, Germany, Oct 9: Martina Hingis swept aside Belgium's Kim Clijsters 6-0, 6-3 in just 51 minutes to claim her fourth Porsche Tennis Grand Prix title on Sunday and claim her sixth title of the year, earning a sponsor's car in the process, reports AFP.

"It was her first final in a big tournament and she'd played very well in the other matches and I knew I had to play well against her," said Hingis, explaining her domination.

"It reminded me a little bit of when I was standing there four years ago. She's a youngster in the final, but I didn't want to give it up. This is my home."

Clijsters said she did not rise to the occasion. "I made some easy mistakes, and that's probably to do with being tired," said Clijsters.

"I've been playing a lot this week and had some tough matches," added the Belgian, who beat Anna Kournikova, Conchita Martinez and Nathalie Tauziat on her way to the biggest final of her career.

"It was all to do with nerves and being tired and not feeling one hundred percent any more," she added.

Hingis got off to the best possible start by breaking Clijsters to love to lead 2-0, but then had to save a break point in the next game. A double-handed backhand error from Clijsters let her off the hook, and Hingis then virtually sewed up the set by breaking for 4-0 when she hit a volley into an empty court after Clijsters had reached a dropshot.

After an 18 minute first set in which Clijsters mostly over-hit the ball, the second became more of a contest as Clijsters settled and showed more control. Hingis was forced to save a break point in the first game

and another three in her next service game as Clijsters finally maintained the rallies and struck the ball cleanly and with pace.

Hingis called for medical attention to a tightening left thigh when leading 4-3, and then promptly came out and claimed the only break of the set to lead 5-3 and serve out for the match.

"In the second set there was a lot of concentration, a lot of focus, because whenever I would slow down a little bit she was right there," Hingis said.

"She can shoot the people off the court and that's what she did in some of the other matches. If you give her a short ball it's over. Only if you guess the right side you're lucky."

Hingis now goes on to play the Swisscom Challenge in Zurich while Clijsters rests for three weeks before playing in Leipzig.

Korea start countdown

SEOUL, Oct 9: South Korean World Cup organisers launched the 600-day countdown to the start of the 2002 finals Monday with two new officials in charge in a bid to end internal wrangling, reports AFP.

FIFA vice-president Chung Mong-Joon and former Seoul Olympics organiser Lee Yun-Taek were put in control of the Korean World Cup Organising Committee (KAWOC) on Saturday.

With World Cup holders France due to kick off the next finals in Seoul on May 31, 2002, South Korea, which is co-hosting the finals with Japan, has staked a lot of prestige on getting the event right.

But KAWOC had been without a chief since July when Park Seh-Jik stood down following political disputes with Chung and the government.

Though the appointment of co-chairmen has raised some fears of organisational blockages, Chung, who is also head of the Korean FA, told a press conference: "We can run faster under a twin leadership. There will be no discord with Mr Lee."

"There will be no problem with the twin leadership because the committee will listen to the opinion of all members."

But both co-chairmen said the government and public should pay more attention to preparations for the soccer extravaganza.

At the moment the new main stadium in Seoul is still a building site and new bridges seem to spring up over the main road from Kimpoo airport into the capital nearly every day.

Chung insisted that "so far preparations for the World Cup have been smooth."

But a countdown check on the state of preparations in South Korea and rival Japan has shown that Japan is ahead on its building work.

World Cup fever is already building with qualifying games underway in Europe and South America. The draw will be held in December 2001.

South Korea and Japan will each stage 32 games in the first World Cup finals to be held in Asia. The opening match is in South Korea and the final in Japan on June 30, 2002.

The Seoul government has divided the 32 games among 10 cities: Seoul, Pusan, Taegu, Incheon, Kwangju, Taejeon, Ulsan, Suwon, Chonju and Sogui-po on Cheju Island.

The Ulsan stadium will be finished by May next year, but most of the other new venues will only be ready in September 2001, giving precious little time

for World Cup tests.

Japan has two stadiums finished and 70 percent of the work is done on the remaining seven. The Yokohama venue requires only minor renovations, and the Miyaki stadium was tested in June with an international against Slovakia.

Other tournament sites will be done by next May, giving Japan the needed time to check for any problems.

South Korea also faces problems with accommodation and is nervous about security.

Organisers are working on an estimate that about 75,000 people, including media and tourists, will visit South Korea on any one day during the football finals.

But at the moment, there are just over 50,000 hotel and inn rooms, and only about 35,000 will be available during the World Cup finals.

Japan has about 4.5 times more hotel rooms, according to Korean media reports.

Transportation is a concern for South Korea and Japan however.

Both have notorious traffic and the only answer so far raised in South Korea is increased use of public transport.

South Korean officials say they are not worried about European hooligans. They doubt that many will make the long flight to the first World Cup finals in Asia.

But the National Police Administration has started a World Cup planning team to be ready for any surprise visits by violent fans.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP EDCQIQDK KGYU EMUYGYU MSQJB BUZIVPMV ZQM SBBEGJB KMKV, "EDC, KPBB, EDC." Yesterday's Cryptogram: I RECKON THAT ANY DOCTOR'S HANDWRITING WILL BE SICKENINGLY ILL-EGIBLE. Today's Cryptogram Clue: E equals H