

Norman in ignominy

AP, Rome

Magnus Norman arrived as Italian Open defending champion feeling a bit down on himself.

But the 24-year-old Swede sank even deeper, losing his first round match in Rome in straight sets to Vincenzo Santopadre, the ATP's 180th ranked player.

"Nothing seems to be going my way," said Norman on Monday, after yet another early exit. "I'm going a terrible period. I don't know how to come out of this situation. I'm devastated."

It was the fifth straight tournament in which the Swede has not managed to get past the second round.

The courts at the Foro Italico court darkened under thick clouds, and the red clay dampened under hard rains. But it was an especially dreary day for Norman, who only a year ago collected his biggest tournament win on the same Centre Court.

Norman, the No. 5 seed, suffered another bruising to his confidence, falling 6-4, 6-3 to Santopadre, an Italian wildcard entry.

With the sun out Tuesday, play began early with Russia's Yevgeny Kafelnikov advancing in his first-round match when Romania's Andrei Pavel withdrew in the second set with back problems.

Kafelnikov was leading 7-5, 3-1, when Pavel pulled out.

On Monday, Norman didn't attribute the loss to the solid play of Santopadre, who fired 24 winners, including well-disguised drop shots that left the Swede charging at second or third bounds.

"It was all me," Norman said minutes after sending an easy backhand wide on match point, the last of his 30 unforced errors.

"I played one of the worst matches of my career." Were there any physical or technical problems? No, it's all in my head. I don't know what to do. I'm playing very well in practice but when I step on the court and see the umpire, I get very tight and can't move my feet."

The precise play which won him last year's tournament and brought him to the French Open finals has lagged in recent months. "This is one of the worst moments of my career," he concluded.

Santopadre won the only other head-to-head showdown with Norman in a 1998 match on clay in Bournemouth, England.

"I knew I had to keep him from playing his game," said the 30-year-old Italian. "Otherwise, he can be deadly."

But after reaching the finals of the Sydney tournament in January, Norman has let his opponents get the better of him.

Last year, Norman was on top of his game in Rome, beating Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten in four sets in the final of the annual Foro Italico affair, and moving to the top of the ATP rankings.

Akhtar

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his third over by cutting one back to bowl Steve Titchard for 11 and reduce Derbyshire to 44 for two.

Sutton was next to go after batting for an hour and a half when he was caught by Imran Farhat off spinner Saqlain Mush-taq for 26.

Matthew Dowman struck six boundaries as he and Stephen Basson held firm until lunch and added another following the restart before Akhtar dismissed him for 36.

Cork had to jab down hurriedly on the next delivery as the 'Rawalpindi Express' picked up speed, but Bassano had no answer as he was trapped in front for 17.

Worse was to come for Derbyshire as wicketkeeper Rashid Latif accepted a thin edge from the bowling of Saqlain to remove Karl Krikken for a duck before the umpires decided the light was not good enough to continue.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the first day of the three-day tour match between Derbyshire and Pakistan Tuesday: **DERBYSHIRE:** First Innings L Sutton c Farhat b Saqlain 26 S Stubblings c Inzamam b Waqar 8 S Titchard b Razaq 11 M Downman b Akhtar 36 C Bassano lbw b Akhtar 17 D Cork lbw b Saqlain 27 K Krikken c Latif b Saqlain 0 N Dumelow c Farhat b Saqlain 6 T Smith not out 6 T Lungley b Saqlain 0 L Wharton not out 0 Extras: (b-5, lb-10, nb-6) 21 Total: (For 9 wks in 58.1 overs) 158 Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-44, 3-62, 4-103, 5-108, 6-115, 7-131, 8-158, 9-158

Bowler O M R W Waqar 6.1 1 17 1 Akhtar 12 0 31 2 Razaq 11 2 36 1 Mahmood 7 1 21 0 Saqlain 21 9 34 5 Farhat 1 0 4 0

PAKISTAN: Mohammad Wasim, Salim Elahi, Faisal Iqbal, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Yousuf Youhana, Rashid Latif, Waqar Younis (captain), Shoaib Akhtar, Abdur Razaq, Saqlain Mush-taq, Azhar Mahmood. Umpires: A Clarkson and P Willey.

Afghans break new ground

Cricket

AP, Torkham

War-weary Afghanistan sent its first cricket team on its first tour Tuesday.

But getting to Pakistan wasn't easy.

The cricketers had to push and shove their way to the giant steel gates that separates the two countries.

They waded through hundreds of their fellow countrymen, who were trying to get to Pakistan to escape a devastating drought and a bitter and protracted civil war.

The team arrived wearing the traditional shalwar kameez, baggy pants and a long tunic, sporting beards - demanded by the ruling Taliban - and wearing the flowing turban, also required attire by the ruling militia.

And they were ready to play cricket.

"We are a good team. This is our first tour and we will show that our players are talented," said Allah Dad Noori, team captain.

Cricket came only recently to Afghanistan, brought there by refugees returning home from

cricket-crazy Pakistan.

Two former Pakistani Test cricketers, Farukh Zaman, who also is an international cricket referee, and Rehmat Gul welcomed the young team on its first tour.

At the request of the International Cricket Council Zaman last year spent several weeks coaching Afghan cricketers.

As well the Afghan team is seeking international cricket membership, along with Bhutan, Maldives, South Korea and Bahrain, said Noori.

The ICC, which is giving equipment to equipment to the impoverished Afghan team, will be sending delegation to the war-battered nation within the next one year before deciding on Afghanistan's membership request, he said.

Afghan cricketers arrived in Pakistan with the permission of the ruling Taliban, a hardline Islamic militia that has imposed a harsh brand of rule on the 95 per cent of the country it controls.

In Afghanistan most forms of light entertainment are outlawed as against the tenets of Islam. Many sports also have been discouraged by hardline Taliban

officials who say it distracts the young from prayer.

But not cricket, says Noori.

"The Taliban have recognised cricket as a sport. We have no problem with the Taliban, rather they are encouraging us," he said.

There are only two cricket pitches in the war-shattered Afghan capital of Kabul. Last year Pakistan donated a roller to make new pitches, said Noori.

"There is a wrong impression that the Taliban have banned sports," said Maulvi Abdul Rehman, vice-president of Afghanistan's Olympic Committee. "We are encouraging the healthy activities but in accordance with our religion and traditions."

The tour, which is a club level tour, will include matches in Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province that borders Afghanistan and Rawalpindi, which neighbours the federal capital of Islamabad.

"Right now the Afghan team is at the club level," said Zaman.

But with practice and equipment, Noori said his team could be world class.

"Given the opportunity we could play in the cricket World Cup and win," he said.

Procter thinks the world of Kemp

REUTERS, Bridgetown

Former national coach Mike Procter believes South Africa have unearthed a special talent in all-rounder Justin Kemp.

The Eastern Province player impressed with the ball in Sunday's one-day international victory over West Indies, removing both openers in his first four overs and returning figures of three for 54 in South Africa's eight wicket win in Grenada.

"He could be awesome one day. He is a special talent," Procter said on Monday.

The 23-year-old, who made his test and one-day international debuts against Sri Lanka in January, may have to bide his time to win a regular place in the team.

But with injuries to all-rounders Jacques Kallis and Lance Klusener, he is set to keep his place for the fifth match of the series on Wednesday.

Kemp has yet to make an impact at the top level with the bat after coming in at number ten in his last two test matches.

He is no tail-ender though, having scored 188 in South Africa's premier first class competition shortly before travelling to the Caribbean.

"I've never batted so low in my life, not in any team at any age," he said. "It's quite an education with the ball so much softer, the pitch scuffed up and the bowlers setting different fields. But I need the experience and I'm learning all the time."

South Africa's quest for the fourth victory that would clinch the seven-match one-day series has been disrupted by injuries to Klusener and Kallis.

Back-to-back wins in Grenada at the weekend put the tourists 3-1 ahead after the home side won the opening match in Jamaica nine days ago.

Kallis missed the fourth game after straining his right calf and is rated no more than 50-50 to recover in time for Wednesday's match at the Kensington Oval.

Klusener has already been ruled out after stretching a groin muscle in the second match in Grenada on Sunday and will have to wait until Trinidad on Saturday at the earliest to make his return.

Rafter back in action soon

AFP, Sydney

Dual US Open champion Pat Rafter will make a comeback to tennis in two weeks, playing singles and doubles at the World Tennis Cup in Dusseldorf, Germany, his manager said Tuesday.

Rafter has been sidelined with an elbow injury since retiring from his Davis Cup singles match in Brazil on April 6 and will use the tournament as his only lead-up to the French Open starting on May 28.

Rafter will team with fellow Australian Lleyton Hewitt for the Team Cup, which does not offer any ATP tour points.

From there he will play one or two lead-up grasscourt tournaments to Wimbledon with a spell scheduled before an assault on the US hardcourt season.

Brother and manager Steve Rafter said his brother hadn't deliberately scaled back his tournaments, it was more a case of last year's Wimbledon finalist "peaking at the right time."

"Everything's fine as far as we can tell, his rehab's been good and he's ready to go," said Steve Rafter here Tuesday.

"He doesn't have a lot of time to play before the French but he'll do his best."

Rafter said his brother hadn't elaborated on his long-term future in the game and didn't want to be drawn on whether he would stick to his word and retire at the end of the year.

"He's just a year-by-year proposition at this stage," Rafter said.

"At the end of the year he'll assess it. As a family we don't talk to him about it, we let the likes of Rochey (Tony Roche) and Newk (John Newcombe) talk to him."

Berasategui bids adieu

AFP, Madrid

A month ahead of his 28th birthday Spain's Alberto Berasategui on Monday announced his retirement from professional tennis.

The clay court specialist and former world number seven won 4.6 million dollars over his ten-year career, reaching the 1994 French Open final and winning 14 singles and doubles titles.

The decision comes after a wild card entry at Barcelona last month resulted in a first round defeat. Berasategui bowed to the inevitable after repetitive injuries kept him from training and a string of young Spanish stars entered the professional circuit.

Henin pulls thru'

Tennis

AFP, Berlin

Belgian teen Justine Henin survived a tough examination from South Africa's Joannette Kruger on Monday before moving into the second round of the 1.18-million-dollar German Open, a warm-up for the French Open in three weeks time.

Henin, with two titles to her name already this season and one of the game's emerging stars at 18, started slowly before digging deep to win 4-6, 6-2, 6-2 after recovering from a break down in the second set.

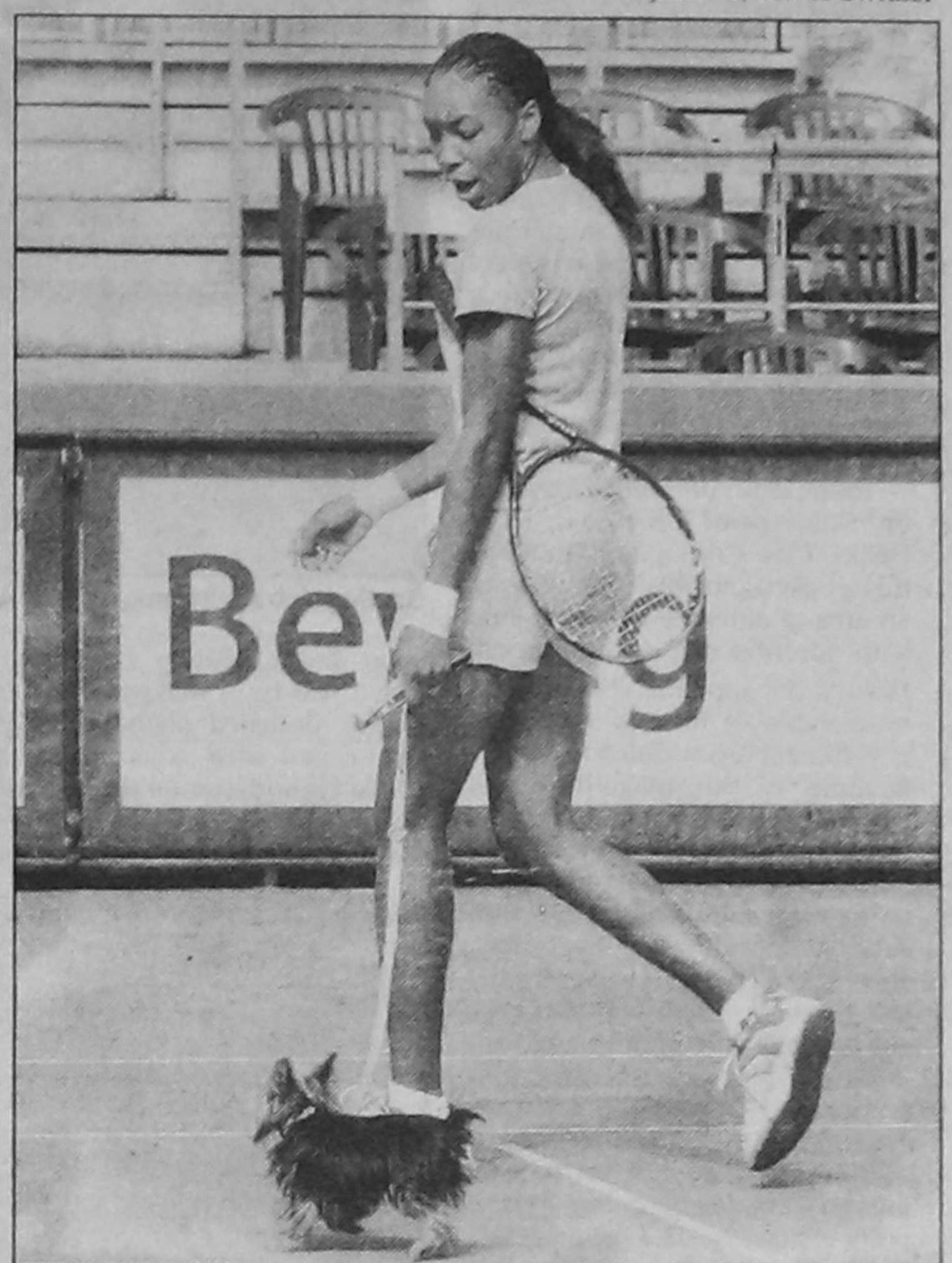
World number 18 Henin, who burst on the scene by winning her debut WTA Tour event at Antwerp two years ago, had beaten 27-year-old Kruger for the loss of just two games on her way to winning the Gold Coast title in January and then won Canberra a week later.

But here she initially struggled to find her focus before shaking off her lethargy and moving through the gears to sweep the second and third sets.

"I wasn't really concentrating in the first set but I was more aggressive afterwards," said Henin.

"The main thing was the win. It's tough for me on this surface," added the blonde youngster.

Other first day winners included Patty Schnyder of Switzerland.



American tennis star Venus Williams walks her dog across a court in Berlin yesterday. Williams is currently in the German city to part in the German Open.

Anywhere is home

Tennis

AFP, Berlin

Japan's Ai Sugiyama started feeling happier about her game during the North American part of the season after buying a house recently in Tampa, Florida.

The move meant she could put down roots on both sides of the world as she seeks to prop up a singles ranking which has sagged of late as the 25-year-old has concentrated on rising to the top of the doubles standings.

But there's no getting around the fact that Europe is a long way from both Tampa and her Japanese base of Kanagawa - so Sugiyama says there's nothing for it but to knuckle down and forget home comforts in the run-up to the French Open and Wimbledon.

"Having the house in Tampa helps me to relax, as it's hard to have a week off before a tournament," explains Sugiyama, who back in Japan helps to run an academy for budding stars, including 18-year-old latest discoverer Yuki Arai and Rika Fujiwara, who has made the leap into the top 200.

"It's a big challenge to find your best tennis in Europe. But I like it."

"Before I didn't like the clay-court season but I started to feel more comfortable last season. I'm sure the work I've been putting in doubles will pay off," says Sugiyama.

yama, who won the US Open doubles crown alongside Julie Halard-Decugis of France and who now stands atop the doubles standings.

"But it's hard to adapt. I enjoy doubles of course but I need to focus a bit more on singles and improve my ranking. I'm not happy with being ranked 47. My goal is to get into the top 20 but I want to be in the top ten."

Sugiyama says she can take comfort from her winning start here and from the fact that she reached the fourth round at the French Open last year, her best showing in Paris since her 1995 debut.

But the greatest motivation for Sugiyama is the recent emergence of Shinobu Asagoe, who now stands at number 55 and who threatens her status as Japanese number one.

Sugiyama confesses the thought has struck her that Asagoe might just be ready to knock her off her domestic pedestal in the coming months but sees the possibility more as her own fault than down to her rival's merits.

"Sure, she's been coming up - but really it's me who's been sliding down."

"Being national number one is definitely a big motivation. I have to pull out all the stops now. It's a challenge to stay ahead," Sugiyama insisted.

Back in Japan Sugiyama is a part owner of a tennis academy cum sports shop which rejoices in

land and Japan's Ai Sugiyama, who scored straightforward wins over Germany's Bianka Lamade and Italy's Rita Grande.

But the 94th edition of the event, the fourth oldest in the women's game behind Wimbledon, and the US and Canadian Opens, was keeping its powder dry on the opening day with all the star names benefiting from first-round byes.

With the French Open looming the key question is who can stop the effervescent Venus Williams, who sauntered her way to glory in Hamburg at the weekend and who in so doing has thrown down the gauntlet to top Berlin seed Martina Hingis.

Hingis, entering her 189th week as world number one - spread over five spells at the top of the pile - now meets Italy's Tathiana Garbin, who crushed Lilia Osterloh of the United States 6-3, 6-1.

Sugiyama set the ball rolling on Centre Court by ousting Grande 6-3, 6-4 with a performance which was polished in the opening set but less so in the second, where she twice dropped serve.

"It's hard to adapt to the clay - but I am very keen to improve my singles ranking," said 25-year-old Sugiyama, ranked number one in doubles and who now has to plot the downfall of 1995 champion Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain.

Joining the 47th-ranked Japanese in the next round alongside Garbin and Schnyder, a 7-5, 7-5 winner over Lamade, was Spanish 15th seed Magui Serna, who saw off Russia's Tatiana Panova 6-4, 6-2, while another Spaniard, Gala Leon Garcia, ousted Meilen Tu of the United States 3-6, 6-3, 6-3.

Leon Garcia next faces last year's finalist Amanda Coetzer of South Africa.

Marta Marrero, a French Open quarter-finalist last year, gave Spain a further boost when US opponent Corina Morariu withdrew with a foot injury, Marrero leading 7-5, 2-1.

Weekend rain ensured that much of Monday was taken up with outstanding qualifying matches to leave only seven first round matches completed.

the name of Belly Button - and having slipped back after first breaking into the top 20 four years ago she is only too well aware that this summer is no time for navel-gazing.

USA to play host to India

AFP, New York

India and the United States will play their Davis Cup qualifying round tie September 21-23 at Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on the campus of Wake Forest University.

The United States Tennis Association announced their venue choice here Monday as Joel Coliseum, where each nation will try to remain in the 16-nation World Group of the annual global men's team tennis event.

The US team has swept all six prior ties with India, including a 5-0 sweep in 1994, their most recent meeting.

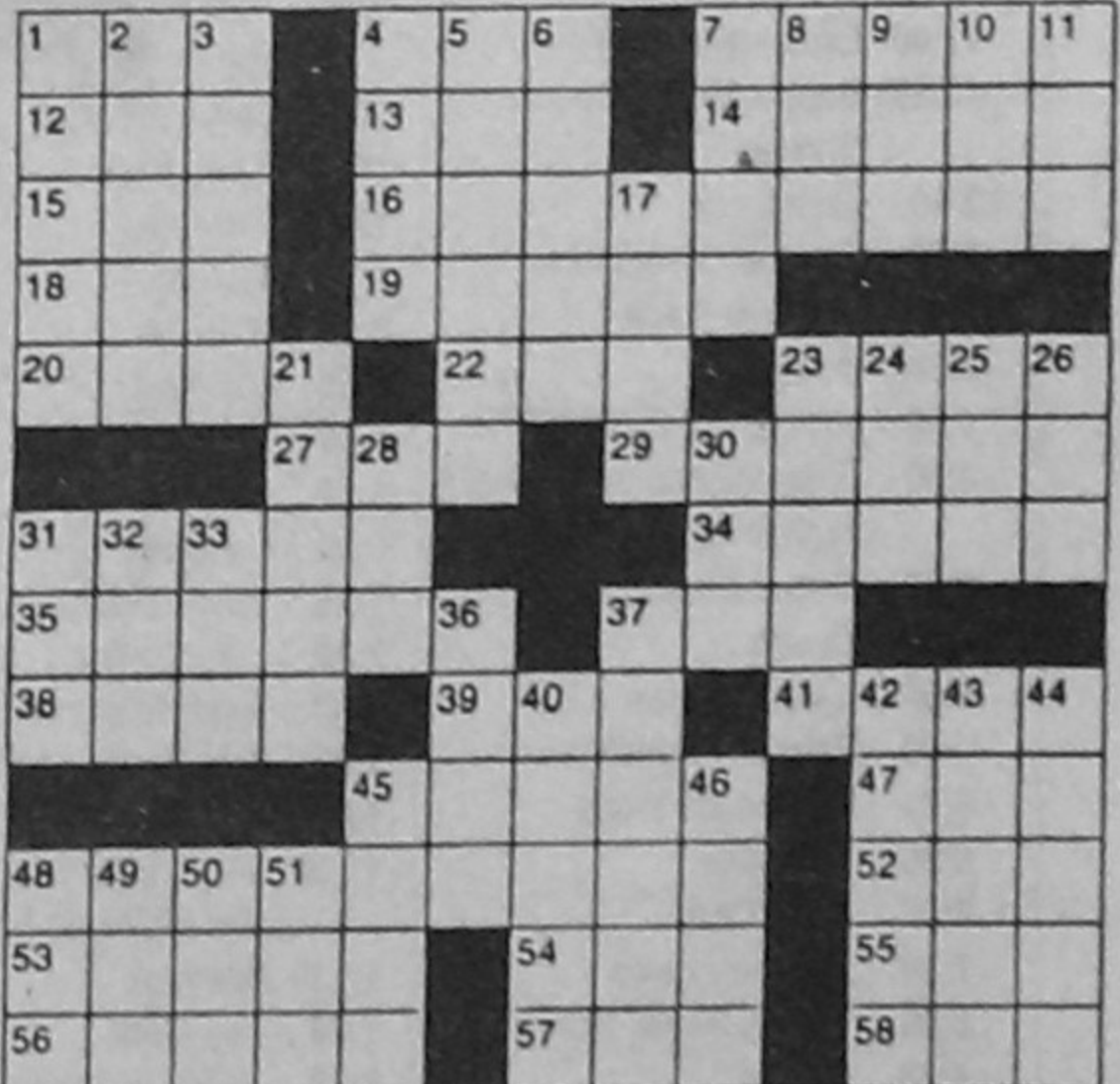
India, expected to be led by doubles stars Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi, will play a US team that suffered its first opening-round loss in Davis Cup play since 1993 when the Swiss inflicted a 3-2 upset.

Rising young standouts Andy Roddick, who won his first two ATP titles the past two weekends, and Jan-Michael Gambill are expected to lead a US team captained by Pat McEnroe.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Tarzan's son
4 Equal status
7 Cobbler's supply
12 Simile center
13 Mamie's man
14 Portion of Hispaniola
15 Fifty XXills
16 Fair exchange
18 Cudgel
19 Fun's directive
20 Neighbor of Turkey
22 Aplyri resident
23 Homer's son
27 E.T.'s craft
29 Mr. Ed's owner
31 Unfriendly
34 Superhot
35 Duty
37 Glutton
38 Bump into
39 Dixie abbr.
41 War-monger

DOWN
1 Disney movie
2 PBS curmudgeon
3 1945 conference site
4 Craters
5 With hands on hips
6 Tend a stubborn shoelace
7 Comic-strip news editor
8 Scull need
9 Torched
10 Composer Hoffmann
11 Perch
17 Took off
21 Ring used in pitching game
23 Bounty captain
25 Play with robots
26 Adjudicate
28 Superloud, musically
30 "Had a Hammer"
31 After-hrs. bank
32 New Guinea port
33 Cinnabar is one
36 "M*A*S*H" actor
37 Tropical fruit
40 "Selena" star
42 Syrian leader
43 Undivided
44 Shade of green
45 Fringe benefit
46 Dance lesson
48 Oom follower
49 "Yankee"
50 Nursery item
51 Calendar abbr.



CRYPTOQUIP

T D L K E H O H T B O T B
R F Y T B R X K H S
L F X C B E I C Y I S
D T Y H F B Y E

Yesterday's Cryptquip: GIRLS ARE LIKELY TO WARN THE WOLFISH POTATO FARMER. "STOP MAKING EYES AT ME!"
Today's Cryptquip Clue: B equals N

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.