

# Tyro topples Andre

## Tennis

AFP, Shanghai

A left-handed teenaged outsider with a killer serve handed drawcard Andre Agassi a shocking first-round defeat at the 400,000-dollar Heineken Open Tuesday, sending the top seed crashing out 7-6, 7-5.

Georgian Irakli Labadze, playing in only his fourth event at the ATP level, wrecked the draw of a tournament already penalised by being programmed opposite Davis Cup semi-finalists this weekend in Sydney and Rotterdam.

Agassi's first visit to China ended on court after one hour, 38 minutes as Labadze came back from a break down in the second set after winning the first in a tie-break effort.

Agassi, already qualified along with Gustavo Kuerten for the season-ending Masters Cup in Sydney in two months, credited his unknown opponent with producing a top effort.

He said that despite the tragic events of the last week in his home country, "I came here committed and ready to play. But he had one of the best serving displays I've ever seen."

Labadze hammered over 13 aces and saved four of the five break points he faced against the 31-year-old American tennis icon. Agassi was playing his first match since losing a thrilling U.S. Open quarter-final to Pete Sampras a fortnight ago.

His last time in Asia, Agassi won the Hong Kong tournament in 1999, beating Boris Becker.

The American said he was not overly distracted by the terror crisis which has shocked the world in recent days. "It's been difficult times



IRAKLI LABADZE

for all of us, but I think sport can be a great healer.

"It can be a distraction from an unfortunate tragedy. It's been difficult for us all. I only wish I'd been able to come here earlier."

Agassi began hitting the morning

after his Saturday night arrival in China's largest city with coach Brad Gilbert. He got a taste of what he could expect from Labadze during a Tuesday morning warmup.

"We hit on the same court," said the seven-time Grand Slam cham-

pion. "I'd never seen him play but I had good information on him from others. I was aware of the power of his serve."

Agassi missed a chance late in the opening set and was then overwhelmed in the ensuing tie-breaker in a contest where several dicey line calls could likely had some effect.

The American returned long to lose the first, but got up a break 2-1 in the second against the East European hopeful. But a frustrating moment towards the end resulted in a mild racket smash from Agassi as he failed to serve out the set to drop to 5-6.

Labadze had to force up the pressure quotient at 6-5 and Agassi got into his final round of trouble as he double-faulted to yield a match point. He saved it on a Labadze unforced error.

But the challenger sent a forehand down the line for another match-winning chance and passed again to ice the upset.

"Late in the second, he went up another gear which I didn't match," said a disappointed Agassi, who plans to remain in China's city of 17 million for a few more days. "I wish I had been able to get here earlier to prepare and adapt to the conditions."

"But I came here as ready as I could be. I just met a guy who played a bigger game on the day."

Second seed Rainer Schuettler advanced into the second round over Michael Russell 7-5, 6-4, while Australian qualifier Michael Tebbutt upset sixth-seeded Russian Andrei Stoliarov 6-3, 6-4.

In other matches, Japan's Takahiro Terachi defeated American Cecil Mammit 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, Yong-il Yoon of Korea ousted Thomas Shimada of Japan, 6-4, 6-4 and Swiss George Basti accounted for Czech qualifier Petr Luxa 6-1, 7-5.

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