

There goes glamour

2002 US OPEN

REUTERS/INTERNET New York
The U.S. Open lost a big chunk of its glitz and glamour when Russian pin-up Anna Kournikova and American teenager Ashley Harkleroad tripped up at the first hurdle in the season's final Grand Slam.

Kournikova, wearing a midriff-baring white and blue outfit, drew the usual screams of approval from a sizeable crowd when she arrived on the Louis Armstrong court.

But 44 minutes later the Russian was jeered through the exit doors following an embarrassing 6-3, 6-0 defeat by 17-year-old Indonesian Angelique Widjaja.

It was Kournikova's first ever opening-round loss at the U.S. Open since making her Flushing Meadows debut in 1996.

Earlier, Harkleroad, another paparazzi favourite billed as "America's Kournikova", was unceremoniously dispatched 6-3, 6-2 by former French Open champion Iva Majoli.

It was a new and improved Kournikova who took to the court. Vilified for not winning a tournament during her seven-year career, Kournikova had been working hard since coming back from a broken foot.

She had hooked up with coach Harold Solomon, who helped Jennifer Capriati get back on track, and the work the two have put in was showing results.

The 21-year-old snapped a five-match losing streak last month in



ANNA KOURNIKOVA

(the point) up and then it was just a mistake. Sometimes I went for too much on the wrong shots.

"I'm behind the baseline or something like that, I went for too much. I made a million mistakes.

"I should have gave her more chance to hit the balls because I didn't give her any chances. It was

through that."

However, there is still a chance to see Kournikova at something she does very well.

She will be playing both women's doubles and mixed doubles. At Wimbledon, the Russian star advanced to the semi-finals in both disciplines.

"I'm still in the tournament, so I'm just going to practise and go out there and play a totally different game," said Kournikova, who won the women's doubles crown at the Australian Open with Martina Hingis.

"I'm just going to go out there and we're going to try to win. I mean, it's hard to be around, but it's fine."

Just 17 and easing her way into the WTA Tour, the blonde Harkleroad has had some good results.

While Kournikova continues to bank millions of dollars in endorsements while searching for her first career title, Harkleroad, who regularly travels to New York for modelling assignments, is developing a winning attitude on the court to compliment her good looks.

She recently showed her promise by following up a victory over world number 36 Rita Grande in San Diego by winning an ITF event in New York.

Add a runner-up finish at another recent ITF tournament, mix in a final appearance at this year's French Open junior event and a Wimbledon junior doubles title in 2001, and the signs are that Harkleroad should hit the headlines for her on-court achievements.

"I do some shoots and enjoy that a lot," said Harkleroad, who rejects the comparisons with Kournikova. "It's fun to do something different besides tennis and to have something else going on."

"I don't think about it too much when people talk about my looks, and just take it as a compliment and kind of live on."



ASHLEY HARKLEROAD

Stanford before reaching the quarter-finals. She built on that result by reaching the semi-finals at San Diego.

Just as pleasing as her on-court results was a new maturity Kournikova displayed as she tried to dispel her diva persona.

"I didn't expect it to be this way at all," said a visibly upset Kournikova. "I thought I had a pretty good draw. I didn't play well at all. I wasn't in the match. I was just not there."

Especially disheartening for the former top-10 player was the way she lost, doing all the things she and Solomon worked hard to change.

A physically gifted but slight player, Kournikova has not always shown patience or correct strategy.

"I think I just played totally the wrong way," she said. "I was going for winners after a second shot. I set

kind of weird because I had all the opportunities. I set up the point, and then when I had to put it away, I was missing it. So that was kind of horrible."

It is a feeling many of the players know and understand, according to Australian Nicole Pratt, who lost to Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova.

"I think it (her match) was sad," Pratt said. "It's sad in the respect that Anna's such a good tennis player, but there's just been so much pressure on her to perform. Her performance today was just all mental."

"She just couldn't cope with being out there. She just rushed through the match, I want to get off the court, I can't do this." When a player gets like that, I think all the players recognise that at some stage in their careers, they've gone

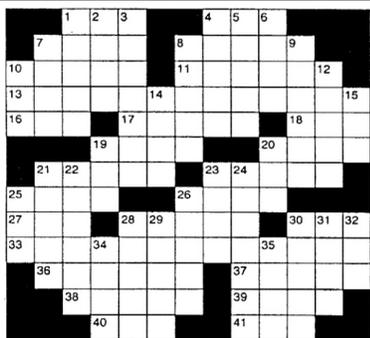


PHOTO: COURTESY

The prize draw ceremony of the 'Probitor Football Fever Quiz,' organised by Novartis (Bangladesh) Limited was held at company's office on August 22.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Go off course 4 relief 7 Pompeii's undoing 8 Makes mucky 10 CBS founder William 11 Conservatives 13 "Animal Crackers" singer 16 Anger 17 Sheedy and McBeal 18 Heavy weight 19 Raise 20 Scapegoat 21 Dispositions 23 Sows 25 Atomizer output 26 Information 27 One (Pref.) 28 Recreation



CRYPTOQUIP

UGV CFFQKEDD LBWCVFX HFBWVR FOD FX GOALVDQ OX FWRVW UFKV E

L AFFUG FHVWEUFW Yesterday's Cryptogram: TEN ANGRY ROOSTERS WENT ON STRIKE TODAY. THEY'LL NO LONGER WORK FOR CHICKEN FEED.

Today's Cryptogram Clue: W equals R The Cryptogram 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.

Flushing Meadows remembers Sept 11

2002 US OPEN

BBC, New York

The 'Ground Zero Heroes' flag was raised at Flushing Meadows as the US Open marked the approaching anniversary of the 11 September terrorist attacks.

Four-time US Open winners Billie Jean King and John McEnroe were among the celebrities taking part in a ceremony on the first night of this year's tournament.

Also paying tribute were actor Judd Hirsch, singer Tony Bennett and rapper Queen Latifah, who sang the American national anthem.

The ceremony paid homage to police, fire-fighters and rescue workers who worked in the aftermath of the attacks in rescue and relief efforts.

"It's another indication our city is well on its way to recovering from

the tragedy of 11 September," New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said.

Bennett led the singing of 'America the Beautiful' while the unfurling of the 'Ground Zero Heroes' flag, signed by family members of those killed in the attacks, received a standing ovation.

The flag was flown by US troops at the Kandahar Airport in Afghanistan.

It now flies above the Arthur Ashe Stadium, which offers a spectacular view of the Manhattan skyline forever changed just two days after the conclusion of last year's US Open.

The flag will be lowered on September 8 after the men's final.

The USTA also planned nightly tributes recalling the events of September 11 between matches throughout the two-week tournament.

Becker wins 'Battle of Germans'

Tennis

REUTERS, Berlin

Boris Becker beat his long-time rival Michael Stich in an exhibition match between the two retired German tennis greats before a sell-out crowd and national television audience.

The three-time Wimbledon champion Becker, 34, defeated 33-year-old Stich, who was long his most bitter rival and upset him in the 1991 Wimbledon final, 7-5 6-4 in

clowning around with each other and the referee. Becker and Stich grabbed the referee's shoes after one call and in mock anger tossed them into the crowd.

"Michael hasn't played for five years but he still has his great technique today after just a few months of practice," said Becker. "He played great today."

The two had last met in a tournament in Vienna in 1996, which Becker won in three sets. He got a measure of revenge on Stich for his heartbreaking 1991 defeat by beating Stich in the Wimbledon



PHOTO: INTERNET

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME: German tennis great Boris Becker (R) talks to his one-time fierce rival Michael Stich after their match.

one hour 25 minutes before 7,000 Berlin spectators.

In the nostalgic match, both players showed flashes of the skills that helped make tennis a celebrated sport in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, but also lots of rustiness -- and almost none of the speed that once made them so dangerous on court.

"Boris was just a little bit too fast for me today," said Stich, who retired five years ago and had not picked up a tennis racket until two months ago to prepare for the match.

"Everything felt a little slower than it used to be.

"But it was tremendous fun and there's nothing better than playing a good match in front of a big crowd," added Stich, who had beaten Becker in four of their eight encounters yet devastated him with the victory in that 1991 Wimbledon final.

Becker, whose life has been plagued by troubles off the court since he retired three years ago, was clearly better prepared and seemed to take the contest far more seriously.

Wearing a grimace on his face for most of the match, he jumped into a 2-0 lead and was never seriously challenged after that in the first set.

The second set was even more lopsided and degenerated into a farce at times with the players

quarter-finals two years later in five sets.

Becker, always the more flamboyant, and Stich, considered dark and moody by German fans, were never close off the court.

Becker triggered a boom in the sport with his upset Wimbledon title in 1995 when he became the youngest Wimbledon men's champion aged 17 years and seven months.

The former world number one seemed to be forever angry at Stich for denying him his fourth Wimbledon title in 1991.

Their rivalry during the heyday of tennis in Germany also split the country into "Becker fans" and "Stich followers".

The pair managed to put their "cold war" aside to team up to win the doubles gold medal for Germany at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. They constantly "high-fived" each other, banged chests on big points and embraced warmly after each win.

But the chill returned shortly after that. "The matches against Michael were always something special," Becker said.

Stich, captain of Germany's Davis Cup team, said he agreed to play the match to help promote tennis in Germany, which has been in a slump since he, Becker and Steffi Graf retired.



PHOTO: AFP

EMOTIONAL MOMENT: The 'Ground Zero Heroes' flag being brought into the National Tennis Centre on Monday as part of a ceremony to pay homage to life lives lost during the attack on the World Trade Centre.

Better safe than sorry

2002 US OPEN

INTERNET, New York

It does not take long for a visitor to notice the major increase in security measures at the U.S. Open.

Terrorists took down the World Trade Centre just two days after the completion of last year's tournament. U.S. Tennis Association officials have spent more than eight months working with city, state and federal officials to implement security plans for this year's Grand Slam event.

Concrete barriers surround the entire National Tennis Centre facility along with a phalanx of uniformed police officers numbering in the hundreds. Police also have stationed many more uniformed and plain-clothes officers inside the facility.

Player and media buses no longer pull up to the main gate. Dropoff points have been set up some 500 yards from entrances and some of the world's best tennis players can be seen lugging their equipment bags over a grassy stretch of Flushing Meadow Park.

Screening stations have been set up at all entrances and new limitations have been established for bags carried by fans. A one-bag limit has been set and bags can be no larger than 12 inches high, 12

inches wide and 16 inches long. All bags will be searched.

In addition, the USTA is prohibiting backpacks, briefcases, fanny packs of any size, large purses, video cameras, camera accessories, telephoto lenses, televisions, radios, coolers, cans or glass containers, flags on sticks or poles and any item deemed dangerous or inappropriate.

Police also will be closing selected roads in and around Flushing Meadow and Corona

Parks, where the National Tennis Centre is located.

Most players would not comment on the increased security, but Swedish veteran Magnus Norman admitted he felt safer.

"The security's very high this year compared to two years ago when I was here," Norman said. "You have guys checking the bags and guys checking the cars. It makes us feel safe. It's a little bit of a hassle, but at the same time, I am very glad that they are here."



PHOTO: AFP

Two New York policemen inspect a US Open official vehicle after it arrives at Flushing Meadows on August 26.

Dokic snubs Aussie Open

2002 US OPEN

INTERNET, New York

Jelena Dokic has ruled out playing the Australian Open for at least five years, saying it's not worth it.

Dokic, 19, says she has no regrets about turning her back on Australia last year to play for her native Yugoslavia following a series of run-ins with Tennis Australia officials.

And while she enjoyed living in Australia for seven years, Dokic did not think she would play the Australian Open again.

"I don't think I will. It's not a priority

but I don't think I'll ever be going back there," Dokic said after her first round US Open win over German Greta Arn today.

"I don't know what's going to happen in five years, but not right now, no."

"It is a Grand Slam, but I can do without that one. After everything that happened, that I had there, I don't think it's worth going back and playing the Australian Open."

Tennis Australia invested an estimated 500,000 Australian dollars in Dokic's development after her family emigrated from the former Serbia in 1994.

But she accused Tennis Australia officials of rigging the draw for the

Australian Open in 2000 and announced she would no longer represent Australia after drawing Lindsay Davenport in the first round in 2001.

Despite describing playing at the Sydney Olympics for Australia as one of her career highlights, Dokic and her family left Australia last year - moving first to the USA and then to Belgrade.

Dokic's father Damir has indicated that a move to Great Britain may be in the cards.

But Dokic said she would continue to represent Yugoslavia.

"I think I've made up my mind who I'm playing for," she said.

Australia's top-ranked women's player Nicole Pratt said Dokic no longer spoke to the Australian players.

"It's disappointing, very disappointing. But we all move on, I guess," Pratt said.

Dokic said she had not talked to her father about the possible move to London.

The decision is taking a back seat to her preparations for the remainder of the tennis season.

"The decision hasn't been made - definitely not now and not any time soon," Dokic said.

"I'm definitely not going to think about that now. It's not a priority."



JELENA DOKIC