



Muster's reign begins

By K.R. Nayar

Dubai
Austria's Thomas Muster blasted the Dubai Tennis Open crown right off Goran Ivanisevic's head at the Dubai Tennis Stadium yesterday, and then went on to supersede the Croatian as the world number two in the ATP rankings.

The 7-5, 7-6 (7-3) victory before a sell-out crowd at the magnificent Aviation Club stadium, fetched Muster 278 points and the coveted No.2 slot in the world behind American Pete Sampras.

The reward for Muster's spectacular exhibition of power tennis, stamina and control was a US\$142,000 winners' cheque. "I felt like a long lasting battery that never stops," remarked Muster after the 1hour 42minute long match.

But the Austrian was quick to applaud Ivanisevic's courageous performance yesterday. "He played a terrific match tonight and I think he has the ability to be the world number one." But there was only one number one yesterday and it was Muster, most of the way.

An arduous battle was expected of these two finalists - the King of Clay versus the Master of the Ace. And so it was.

The duo went in to the final, locked 2-2 in career matches, though Muster had the advantage of having scored a more recent victory at the 1997 Australian

Open quarterfinals.

The clash between the two left-handers got off to an eventful start. Ivanisevic, leading 30-15, stubbornly questioned a net call, which hinted at his lack of control over his infamous temper. More was to follow and even a code violation for racket abuse in the first set when Muster broke for 6-5.

Muster struggled to hold serve in the early stages but fought back valiantly. Ivanisevic, who one

centre court, but not the scorching power of Ivanisevic's serve. Muster, however, countered the aces by moving faster on court and he was able to step his game up a gear or two at crunch time.

Ivanisevic, who produced some spectacular whiplash passing shots in the semifinals against Jiri Novak, began to stutter. "If you don't take your chances against Muster, you don't win. I lost a lot of opportunities," he remarked.

Muster, making his fifth appearance here, had earlier reached the semifinals in 1993. He arrived in Dubai this year and was hoping to match the feat, but he went two better.

The game he produced yesterday was that of a champion. His backhand power drives in front his advancing opponent were exquisite. To make things more easy for Muster, Ivanisevic hit the net repeatedly.

The turning point of the set came in the 11th game. Muster broke Ivanisevic and the dejected defending champion threw his racket away after hitting the ball out. He was promptly handed a code violation by umpire Gerry Armstrong.

Ivanisevic began to exhibit his frustration more. Once when a ball sat on the top of his net and fell on to his court, he picked it up and gave a killing stare. Muster held his serve and pocketed the first set.

The anger in Ivanisevic increased the speed of his ace. It

was a treat to watch the lanky Croatian produce the ace. He threw the ball high in the air, he gathered up his long body for the smite, he smote hard and many times Muster had to watch the ball whiz past him.

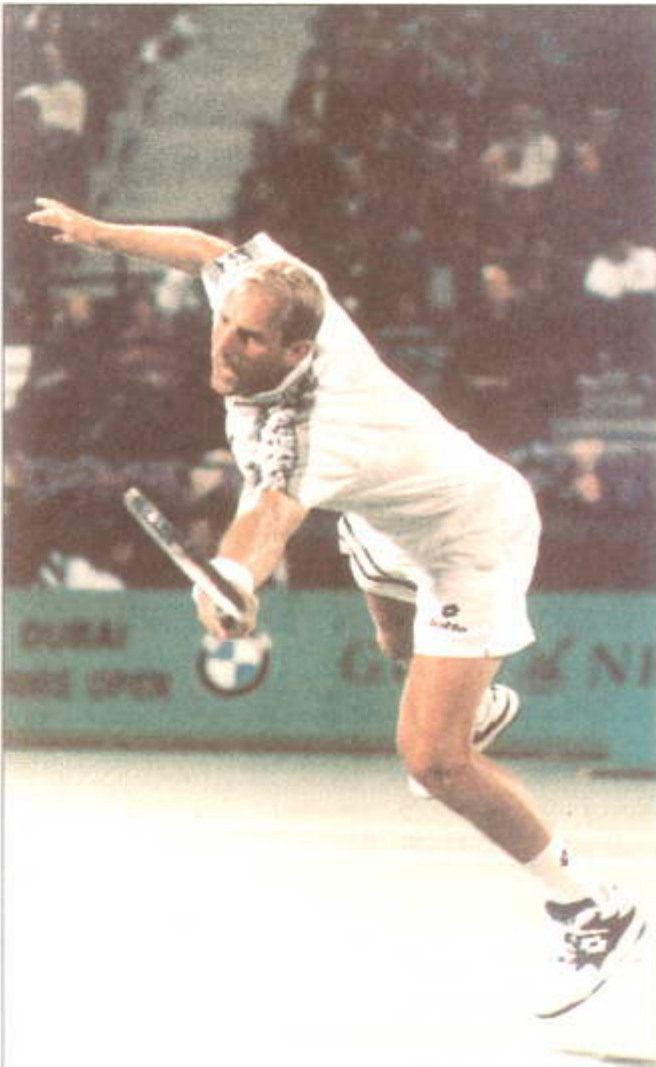
In the second game of the second set Ivanisevic produced three aces, two of them consecutive. Muster countered them with incredible reaction which would have made a cat shy. Ivanisevic's strokes suddenly became timid. He hit an easy return on to the net and walked up to the net and bit it too. His game began to crumble. The crowd that backed him first, screamed "Goran go back". Tremendous rallies followed. Ivanisevic sent in some perfectly placed drop shots and Muster counter-punched with solid baseline play.

The set remained evenly balanced with neither player earning a break point until Ivanisevic led 5-4. Ivanisevic once earned three set points and lost all three. He kept his emotions under control but it was too late. Muster controlled the tie break from the start and won 7-3.

"I played extremely well from the backcourt and put pressure on him when necessary. The rallies were on my side and the serve was on his side and I knew I had to break him once to win the match and it happened. My goal is now the French Open," remarked Muster.



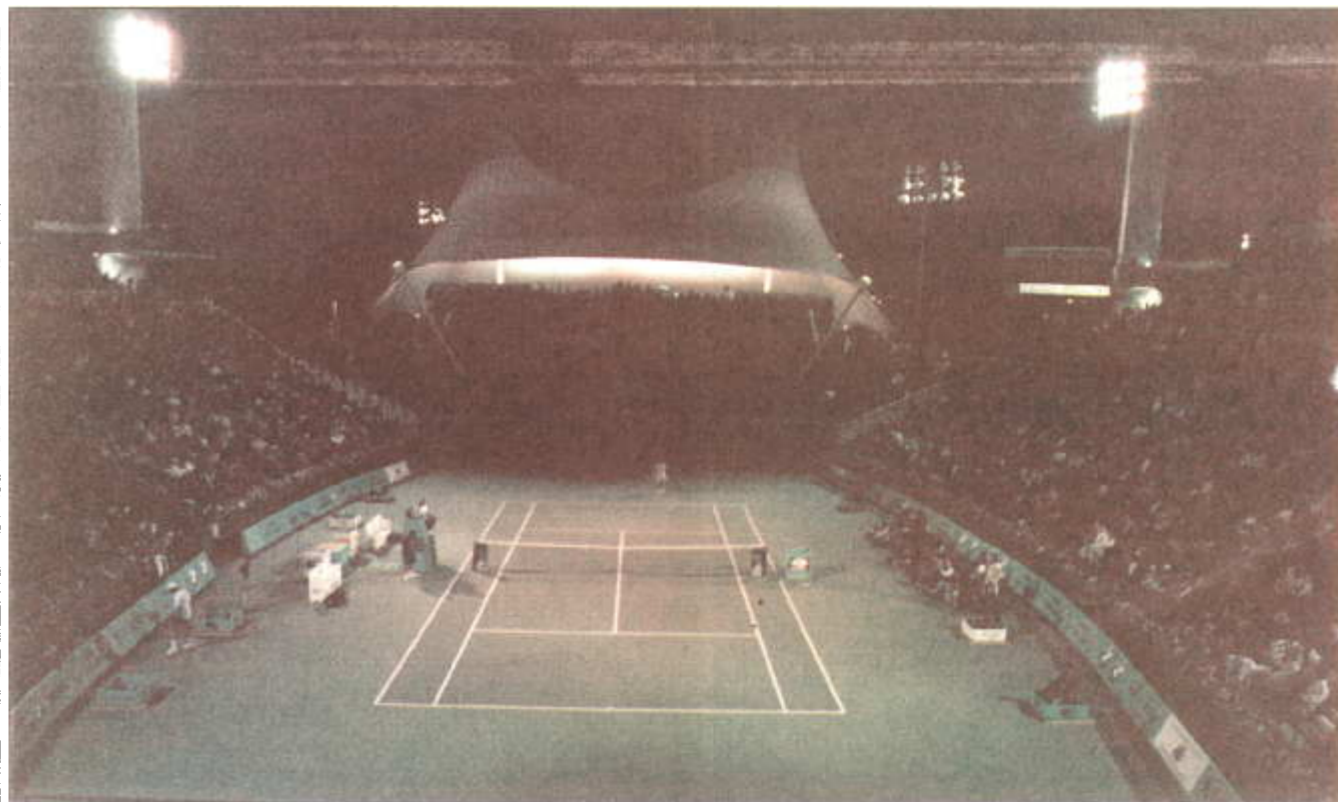
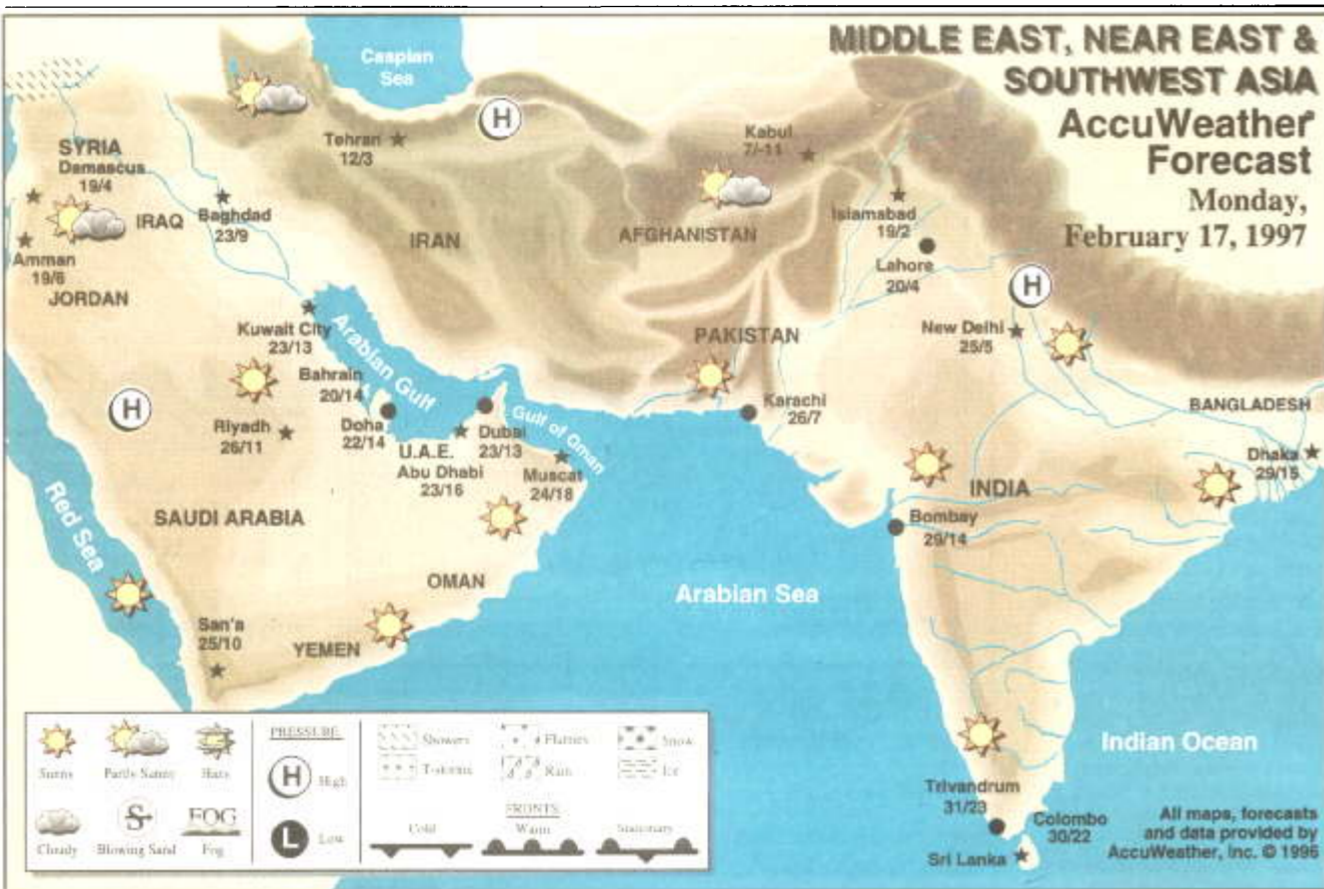
The vanquished...Goran Ivanisevic. GN picture by Anwar Mirza.



The victor... Thomas Muster. - GN picture by Anwar Mirza.



said: "When I need I hit some aces. It is my biggest weapon. It is God's gift to me," began to resort to his big weapon. And it worked, to a great extent. In the third game, he unleashed his 25th ace of the tournament and celebrated it with two more to hold serve. The mercury level dropped at the



The ambience... The final night at the Dubai Tennis Stadium yesterday where Goran Ivanisevic and Thomas Muster dished out top fare. - GN picture by Sevag Davidian.

REGIONAL WEATHER			WORLD WEATHER TODAY		
City	High	Low	City	High	Low
Abu Dhabi	23 73	16 61 s	Frankfurt	0 32	-2 29 c
Bahrain	20 68	14 57 s	Hanare	29 84	4 39 s
Doha	22 71	14 57 s	Hong Kong	18 64	14 57 c
Dubai	23 73	13 55 s	Honolulu	27 80	19 66 pc
Muscat	24 75	18 64 s	Islamabad	19 66	2 35 s
Sharjah	23 73	13 55 s	Istanbul	6 43	-3 27 r
			Jakarta	29 84	24 75 pc
			Kuala Lumpur	32 89	23 73 c
			London	13 55	8 46 pc
			Los Angeles	19 66	12 53 pc
			Madrid	15 59	2 35 pc
			Manila	32 89	21 70 pc
			Makkah	30 86	18 64 s
			Miami	24 75	19 66 c
			Moscow	-14 7	-21 5 c
			Nairobi	30 86	10 50 s
			New York	-1 31	-4 25 sf
			Nicosia	18 64	9 48 s
			Rio de Janeiro	32 89	23 73 pc
			Riyadh	26 79	11 52 pc
			Rome	11 52	4 39 pc
			San Francisco	17 62	7 44 pc
			Seoul	-1 31	-9 16 pc
			Stockholm	-5 22	-13 9 s
			Taipei	17 62	12 53 c
			Toronto	-8 18	-9 16 sn
			Vienna	2 35	0 32 pc
			Warsaw	-3 27	-8 18 s
			Washington	4 39	-4 25 s
			Zurich	4 39	2 35 sf

ABU DHABI, DUBAI & NORTHERN EMIRATES		TIDES TODAY		SUNRISE/SUNSET	
Today	Bright and sunny with a warm afternoon. Clear tonight.	Location	High	Today	Sunrise
Tomorrow	Warm with bright sunshine. Mainly clear at night.	Dubai	7:55 a.m. 1:20 a.m. 10:25 p.m. 4:07 p.m.	Dubai	6:52 a.m. 6:14 p.m.
High 23(73), Low 13(55)	High 24(75), Low 14(57)	Abu Dhabi	9:22 a.m. 3:03 a.m. 5:18 p.m.	Abu Dhabi	6:55 a.m. 6:18 p.m.
		Khorr Fakkan	4:50 a.m. 12:06 a.m. 7:52 p.m. 12:37 p.m.	Bahrain	7:12 a.m. 6:32 p.m.
				Tomorrow	Sunrise
				Dubai	6:51 a.m. 6:14 p.m.
				Abu Dhabi	6:54 a.m. 6:19 p.m.
				Bahrain	7:11 a.m. 6:32 p.m.

Muster plays the Muster game best

By Suresh Menon

Thomas Muster was on fire. In fact, the fire alarm went off at the post-match press conference where the champion put his finger unerringly on the weakness in Goran Ivanisevic's game: "He plays a risky game. Goran's strength is his service, mine is in long rallies."

The service let Ivanisevic down in the tie-breaker which saw some of the finest tennis of the tournament. Two fine matches on the last two days: the crowd could not have asked for more. They were ecstatic, even the fan sitting behind me who kept urging Boris Becker to make a match of it.

Occasionally, the players reversed roles. Muster would come up to the net (and be passed on either flank by Ivanisevic with all the insouciance of a driver splashing rain-water onto a pedestrian's new clothes); Ivanisevic would try to play Muster's game from the baseline. The second set provided some great moments. Muster whipped Ivanisevic around from end to end, showing that Muster plays the Muster game better than anyone else.

It is a game based on fitness, tenacity, the willingness to tire an opponent out.

It is built on a deceptively simple theory: hit the ball one time more than your opponent does. Muster doesn't want to beat the hell out of a tennis ball -- something that was the philosophy of Jimmy Connors. He is happy if he gets his opponent to miss one.

"I don't know why critics say I cannot play the hardcourt game," Muster asked, quite puzzled.

The longer they stayed on court, the brighter were Muster's chances. Ivanisevic cracked a couple of times, then extended the action to jolly the crowd. And what a crowd it was! When the night is nippy, and the canopy over the VIP stand is lit, and Muster is putting in a night's work ("I slept through the day to prepare myself for the matches," he was to say), there is no better place to be.

Muster certainly thought so. "It is one of the best tournaments," he said, "and it's nice to leave with the trophy and some cash in the pocket."

The crowd cheered his speech; hopefully some of them will heed him: "Don't scream 'out' while a rally is on," he advised.

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