

Mauresmo's promise

By A Sports Reporter

Dubai
Defending champion Amelie Mauresmo flew out of Dubai last night with a promise to make a return for next year's tournament.

The Frenchwoman, who was forced to retire with a worrying abductor muscle in her semifinal against Monica Seles midway through the second set, said she hoped to return for next year's tournament. "Of course, I will come back here for the third time next year," Mauresmo promised.

"This (the injury) is not a problem with Dubai. It's about my ability to take physical strain. I'll see if I can go and do some shopping now and get some good deals," the sixth ranked WTA player said. Mauresmo will fly back straight to Paris, where she is scheduled to meet her doctor and get an opinion on her abductor strain. Mauresmo has had a miserable run so far this year after being sidelined for four months with a cartilage inflammation of the right knee since mid-October last year. The first event she played two weeks ago was on home soil in Paris Indoors where she fell to Venus Williams in the final.

"It's a miracle, it's unbelievable that my knee has been able to take in so much strain," Mauresmo said.



Justine Henin-Hardenne returns to Jennifer Capriati. - GN pictures by Joseph J. Capellan



Monica Seles makes a double-fisted backhand on her way to victory. - GN pictures by Hadrian Hernandez

Henin-Hardenne clinches a thriller

Edges out Capriati in a gruelling encounter; to take on Seles in Dubai Open final; tame end to Mauresmo's dreams

By A Sports Reporter

Dubai
Jennifer Capriati and Justine Henin-Hardenne more than made up for some lost action earlier in the afternoon as they battled over two hours to provide one of the most entertaining matches at the Dubai Tennis Championships till date.

That the match ended with the third-seeded Capriati on the losing side was a pity as both players walked away winners in the eyes of the good holiday crowd, even though the scoreline stood in favour of the Belgian at 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

When Capriati thumped a backhand return into the net in the 10th game of the deciding third set, Henin-Hardenne pumped her fist in the air as the crowd stood up to give both players a rousing salute for the fare

they had displayed through the evening.

The afternoon's opening semifinal was a bit of a disappointment with defending champion and second seed, Amelie Mauresmo falling to a niggling adductor injury against a resurgent Monica Seles after the American held sway leading 6-3, 2-2.

Coming together

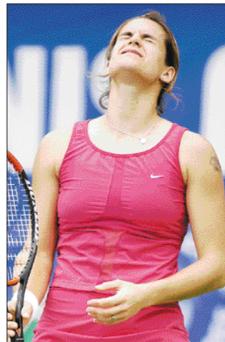
"It's hard to see someone retiring," Seles said of her French opponent after the semifinal.

"I'm happy my game is coming together so well," she added as she left to practice on Court No. 4 with her hitting partner, Andreas Bibek.

But the second semifinal between Capriati and Henin-Hardenne was out of this world as both players kept the crowd glued



Capriati...fights to the end.



Mauresmo...dreams shattered

to their seats throughout the encounter.

"Capriati is a great champion and fighter," Henin-Hardenne

acknowledged after the tussle for supremacy on centre court.

This tussle went on right through the match as both players broke each other early in the first set to be level 1-1. Henin-Hardenne came up with a second break in the very next game to lead 2-1.

But this was brought on par with Capriati breaking Henin-Hardenne in the eighth game to be on level terms 4-4.

The most crucial break came in the 11th game as the top seeded Belgian led Capriati 6-5, needed just to hold her serve to snatch the set.

Evenly-matched

The second set was more evenly matched with Capriati coming out with a fine passing forehand down the line to break Henin-Hardenne and take the set 6-4.

The third set was among the most entertaining seen on centre court in recent memory. With neither of the two giving anything away, the crucial break came in the fifth game as Henin-Hardenne led 3-2.

She then handled the pressure and swift ground-strokes of her American opponent to seal the victory in exactly two hours and 26 minutes.

"Seles is playing so well and it will be a tough final tomorrow," Henin-Hardenne promised.

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RESULTS

Singles: Monica Seles bt Amelie Mauresmo 6-3, 2-2 (ret.); Justine Henin-Hardenne bt Jennifer Capriati 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

Ivanisevic gets a wild card

By A Sports Reporter

Dubai
Former Dubai Open champion Goran Ivanisevic has been given a wild card for the Dubai Duty Free Men's Open which gets under way at the Dubai Tennis Stadium tomorrow.

The qualifiers for the main draw will start from today. Salah bin Tahlak, the new tournament director, was quick to confirm the presence of the former champion at this year's tournament as a wild card.

"It's a tremendous boost for the tournament for a former champion of the caliber of Goran coming in and requesting for a wild card," bin Tahlak said. "It's so positive for the image of the tournament and the tough competition that we are all guaranteed for the next one week."

He, however, refrained from divulging the names of the two other players who have been offered wild cards here.

The main draw for this year's Dubai Open is led by third ranked Marat Safin of Russia along with fourth ranked Juan Carlos Ferrero, sixth ranked Roger Federer, seventh ranked Jiri Novak, eighth ranked Tim Henman and 10th ranked Tommy Haas of Germany.

"It's such a great line-up for the tournament, something similar to what we had for the ladies competition. This just puts the name and fame of Dubai a few notches higher," bin Tahlak said.



Goran Ivanisevic in Dubai.



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