

LAS VEGAS SENTINEL

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## SPORTLIGHT

By R.L. Greene

NEW YROK — History was made last month in Lyon, France, when three black players gained the quarter-finals of a Nabisco Grand Prix tennis tournament.

The local hero was France's Yannick Noah, but he was upset by Todd Nelson, a 6-foot, 1-inch right-hander from San Diego. The winner of the other semifinal was Yaya Dombia of Senegal, a country not considered a hotbed of tennis by any stretch of the imagination.

Yaya, Senegal's Number One player and the leader of his country's Davis Cup team, went on to defeat Nelson in the final. It was Dombia's first title in what is called an "official" tournament. It also was his first appearance in a Grand Prix main-draw singles tournament.

After winning the championship match 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, Dombia received a telegram from the president of Senegal, Abdou Diouf, congratulating him. For Senegal and most of Black Africa, it was a special occasion.

At the age of 24, Dombia has traveled the backroads of tennis, playing in small tournaments in Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Egypt and, occasionally, Europe and the United States. Now he's a champion of a major tournament. The impact of his victory was not lost on the Senegalese player.

"I don't have any sponsors," Dombia said after his victory. "I just try to make it. It's very important for me and the country I represent. In Africa there is a lot of talent, and in two years African tennis will start moving."

"There are some young players coming up in Senegal. The (Senegalese tennis) federation is trying to bring them up. It's really difficult to buy a racquet, to buy clothes. It's expensive."

"So the federation is trying to give them all that free so that they can come into tennis. I hope my victory is

going to do something for the federation."

A story told repeatedly is how Arthur Ashe, the only Black man to win the singles titles at both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open — the world's two most prestigious tournaments — happen to discover Yannick Noah, then a young boy, playing with a homemade tennis racquet in Cameroon. Through Ashe's contacts, Noah, who was born in France, returned to his native land where he was enrolled in a tennis program.

In 1983, Noah became the first Frenchman in 37 years to win the French Open.

There was no Arthur Ashe in Dombia's background. But there was the Senegal Tennis Federation and its president, Abdouabdoulye Dieye. Several years ago, the federation paid for Dombia to travel to the United States where he enrolled at the Port Washington, N.Y., Tennis Academy, the same facility where John McEnroe received part of his early training.

One of nine children — he has five sisters and three brothers — Dombia attended Lander Colleg in Greenwood, S.C., in 1986.

But he has represented Senegal in Davis Cup every year since 1984 and has been that country's top-ranked player since 1982. And while that African nation is not even close to being competitive with the world powers in tennis, one good player like Yaya has made Senegal more than respectable in the prestigious international tennis competition.

Last year, with Yaya leading the way, Senegal defeated Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Norway in Davis Cup play.

"We train regularly together at Roland Garros in Paris," France's Thierry Pham said of Dombia. "He is very fast with his legs and has an extremely powerful serve and volley and good tactics."

In the Lyon tournament, Dombia had to play in the qualifying before he could compete in the main draw. That's what happens when

the computer says you're the 453rd best player in the world. And in the first round of the main draw, Yaya had to play the tournament's Number Two seed, Andrei Chesnokov of the Soviet Union.

"He was playing well, serving well," Dombia said of Chesnokov. "I was just playing out of my mind, I guess."

Until this year, Dombia had won \$8,060 in official earnings during his tennis career. After his first tournament title, Yaya has earned nearly \$50,000 this year.

Oh, yes. The computer now says Yaya is ranked 125th in the world. And rising fast.

## GEORGE FOREMAN IS TOP HEAVYWEIGHT KNOCKOUT PUNCHER

If boxing's knockout statistics were figured as batting averages, George Foreman, with 49 KO's in 52 professional fights, would be the heaviest hitter of all the sport's heavyweight champions.

Now training for a March 19 bout at Caesars Palace against two-time title holder Dweight Muhammad Qawi, Foreman has a .907 average, followed by current champ Mike Tyson at .879 and undefeated Rocky Marciano third at .877. Foreman also tops the list for most consecutive kayo's (24) among world heavyweight champions.

Once skeptical about Foreman's comeback, boxing en-

thusiasts are rallying around the powerful puncher, who has racked up seven straight knockout victories since emerging from retirement last March. With high television ratings and growing

crowd counts, Foreman is rekindling memories and re-establishing his reputation as top knockout expert.

Following is a list of the division's top ten heavy hitters:

	WON	KO's	LOST	DREW	KO's/ BOUTS/ WINS	BATTING AVERAGE TOTAL BOUTS/ KO's
1. GEORGE FOREMAN	52	49	2	0	.942	.907
2. Mike Tyson	33	29	0	0	.879	.879
3. Rocky Marciano	49	43	0	0	.877	.877
4. Joe Louis	63	49	3	0	.778	.742
5. Joe Frazier	32	27	4	1	.844	.730
6. Ken Norton	44	33	7	1	.750	.635
7. Max Baer	70	52	13	0	.743	.627
8. Jack Dempsey	64	49	6	9	.766	.620
9. Muhammad Ali	56	37	5	0	.661	.607
10. Max Schmeling	56	38	10	4	.679	.543

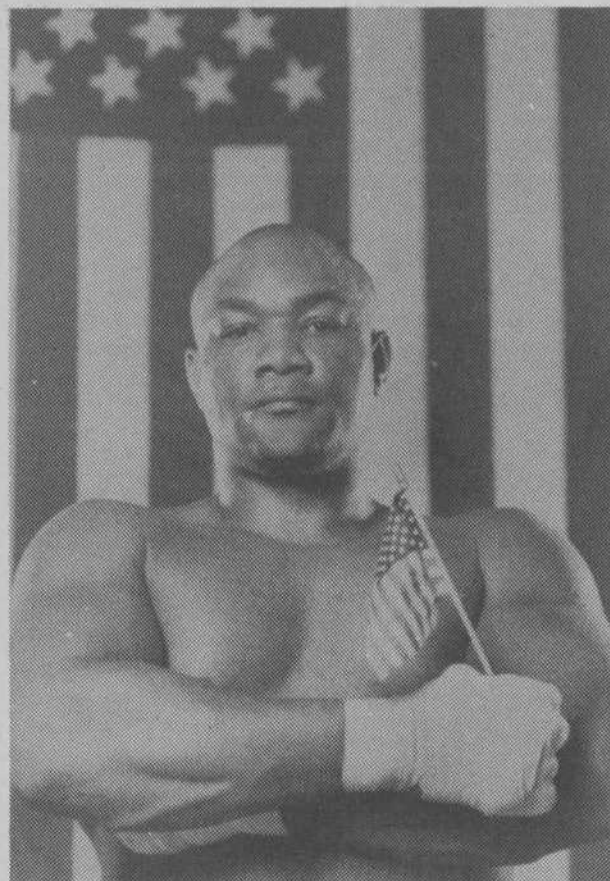
## Greater Votes, Greater Power

Former heavyweight champion George Foreman (52-2, 49 KO's) of Houston, Texas will take on two-time champion Dwight Muhammad Qawi (28-5-1, 17 KO's) of Camden, N.J. in a scheduled 10-round main event on Saturday, March

19. Three NABF title bouts in three divisions are also scheduled, featuring middleweight champion Michael Nunn (28-0, 18KO's) of North Hollywood, Calif., heavyweight title holder Orlin Norris (15-1, 8 KO's) of San

Diego, Calif. and cruiserweight champion Smokin' Bert Cooper (18-2, 15 KO's) of Philadelphia, Penn.

Presented by Top Rank, Inc. and Caesars Palace, the fights will take place at Caesars Palace Pavilion.



George Foreman

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