

Mystery theater: Poison injected into Davis Cup?

by Jerry Magee - CNS

When Dwight F. Davis in 1899 commissioned the creation of the Davis Cup, his motivations hardly could have been more benign. Davis, then a Harvard student and a leading American tennis player, wanted to do something for his sport that would fight off that upstart, golf.

Nothing sinister there. But an event meant to foster good feeling among nations has become the stuff of international intrigue with a contention by Alex Waske, a former San Diego State player, that one of his associates on Germany's Davis Cup squad had been poisoned when he played a singles match against Russia.

In the match, the German player, Tommy Haas, was roundly outplayed by Igor Andreev, with Andreev's victory on a clay court contributing to Russia gaining a Davis Cup final against the United States in Portland from Nov. 30-Dec. 2.

At San Diego State is Larry Willens, a volunteer assistant tennis coach who has counseled Waske through his time on the ATP Tour. Monday, at Waske's invitation, Willens was considering going to Germany and working with the player while he acts to rid himself of an elbow problem.

Willens said Waske is not the type of person who would make a frivolous accusation. "Absolutely not," said Willens, whose thinking is that a Russian advised Waske that somebody had put something improper in Haas' porridge, so to speak.

One thinks here of the incident in Great Britain in which Alexander Litvinenko, 43, a reputed Russian spy said to have come into disfavor in the Kremlin, died after polonium 210, a radioactive substance that can be fatal when ingested in minute amounts, was found in his system.

If, indeed, Haas was poisoned, Willens said that in his thinking the intent was not to kill him but only to sicken him to a degree that he could not be effective on a tennis court. Haas competed after the tie against Russia but did not do well and has returned to his home in Bradenton, Fla., for tests.

Tennis, meantime, continues to be blighted by players being associated with gambling within the sport. The leading question relating to the U.S.-Russia tie continues to be whether Russia will include Nikolay Davydenko, its highest-ranked hardcourt player, on its squad.

The tennis establishment has not completed an inquiry into whether Davydenko had any culpability when "irregular betting patterns" surfaced on one of his matches at the Poland Open in August. Davydenko's lawyer, Frank Immenga, is charging that tennis authorities are making Davydenko the subject of a "witch hunt." Immenga told the Telegraph, a London publication, that Davydenko is experiencing "severe signs of depression." Immenga is asking ATP officials to act against the chair umpires who urged Davydenko to demonstrate greater effort in two recent tournaments.

Mystery theater: Poison injected into Davis Cup? by Jerry Magee - CNS