

Bodies of three Greek sailors returned home

The bodies of three Greek sailors who died when a blaze broke out on the Aegean Wind cargo ship off Venezuela on Christmas Day were returned to Greece yesterday after authorities in the Netherlands Antilles reversed a decision that would have led to the corpses being cremated on the Caribbean islands.

Officials had refused to allow the bodies to be flown to Greece for hygiene reasons because they were decomposing and insisted that the families of the deceased travel to the Netherlands Antilles to attend a cremation ceremony. However, after negotiations, the Greek government managed to secure the return of the bodies of Giorgos Xypolitakis, 23, Giorgos Kalfayiannis, 52, and Constantinos Moutsinas, 55, which were flown to Athens International Airport yesterday. The Greek sailors were among nine people killed in the fire.

Australian witnesses vital in Greek murder case



FIVE Australian witnesses have been summoned to Greece to give evidence in the trial of the man accused of murdering Sydney man Doujon Zammit.

Prosecutors are frantically working to secure the attendance of the witnesses, believed to include 20-year-old Mr Zammit's mother and cousin, at the trial which begins in Lesbos on January 13.

Greek authorities have pledged financial assistance to the witnesses to ensure they testify against 26-year-old bouncer Marios Antonopoulos, who is accused of bashing Mr Zammit after he left a Mykonos nightclub in July 2008.

The Zammit family's Australian lawyer Nick Pappas said: "The prosecutors are concerned that if these key witnesses do not appear at the trial, the prosecution's hopes for a conviction will be severely diminished."

Mr Zammit and his cousin Cameron Tabone, 20, were both allegedly attacked by four bouncers after leaving the Tropicana Bar and refusing to hand over their passports.

Article from The Sydney Morning Herald



Greek Priest from California Helps African Village

Simon Thomas (left with his family), 34, is one of two ordained priests produced in recent years by Modesto's Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church. For 3½ years, he's been head priest at Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, leading 175 families, about half the size of Modesto's congregation.

In February, a local opera star's performance pulled in \$75,000 for the Tanzanian mission, enough to build the church that will be nearly finished when Father Simon visits in late January. It's in Kazinga, a rural village where the next goal is to dig a well with clean drinking water. Tanzania's violent neighbors, Uganda and Rwanda, were depicted in the movies "The Last King of Scotland" and "Hotel Rwanda." Another nearby country, Kenya, came to the brink of civil war two years ago. Tanzania, home to the famed Mount Kilimanjaro, is far more stable, though life expectancy hovers around 50 years and the average yearly income is about \$1,100. "To build a building is beyond their financial means," Simon Thomas said. "To support a building is within their means. We're building infrastructure they can use to build themselves up, instead of throwing money at them." Thomas' group will bring medical supplies and doctors, a reminder of a dream long past.

(Source: Modesto Bee)

Marcos Baghdatis set to reclaim mantle of cult hero

THE designer stubble is there, so is the infectious smile, and the tricks with a tennis ball. Yep, Marcos Baghdatis is back.

It may be four years since the young man from the Mediterranean island of Cyprus took everyone on a merry dance right to the Australian Open final. He may have been savaged there by Roger Federer, but his cult hero status is still intact.

And it seems so is his game after a rocky 2008 season riddled with injuries that restricted him to just 12 tournaments. Last year provided much happier times for Baghdatis.

He won three events on the ITF circuit (in France, Tashkent and Canada) and then finished off the year with a win at the ATP's Stockholm tournament. That pushed him back inside the top 50 once and boosted his confidence no end.

"I wasn't playing very good after I left last year's Australian Open, but I picked things up at the end of the year winning a few Challengers and a Grand Prix," Baghdatis said.

"It was like two months ago so it's tough to keep the momentum with holidays and not practising physically a lot.

"But I feel quite fit, I'm playing good tennis and I'm confident, so I think everything will be fine. I feel great here and I'm happy coming back."

It was not all bad last year. After losing in the first round in Brisbane to Finland's Jarkko Nieminen, Baghdatis made the fourth round in Melbourne, losing to 2008 Australian Open's defending champion Novak Djokovic.

He never intended to live off his 2006 exploits but everyone still remembers. At a late-afternoon practise session at the Queensland Tennis Centre, he signed giant tennis balls, autograph books and baseball caps before posing for photos with fans, who recognised him and stopped to watch.

He didn't disappoint, head-butting tennis balls, catching them on the fly on his shoe before kicking them soccer ball-like into the backcourt covers. He even showed a new trick of retrieving a ball from the court surface. He squeezes down hard with his foot on one side before releasing the pressure so the ball pops up so he can catch it on his racquet.

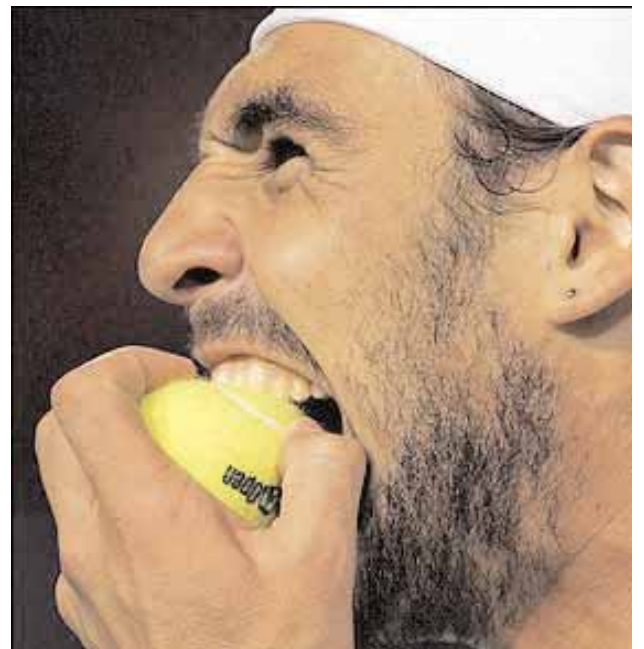
Baghdatis also knows his legion of Greek and Cypriot fans will not be far away.

"I'm pretty sure they will be there."

While definitely one of the characters of the men's tour, Baghdatis teamed up with one of the stalwarts of the women's in Daniela Hantuchova yesterday to play a charity doubles match with Australians Casey Dellacqua, Scott Draper and rising Queensland academy stars, Ashleigh Barty and Travis Boon.

The money raised went to the Kim Walters foundation for research into breast and ovarian cancer. The former wife of Brisbane NRL star Kevin Walters died of breast cancer at the age of 30.

It is hard to believe the svelte Hantuchova is about to embark on her 12th year on the WTA tour at the age of 26. She is ranked No 24 and for the past six years has not been outside the top 30. But she has set a goal for 2010 to get back inside the top 10, where she finished in 2007.



Helping her in that quest is former Andre Agassi and Lleyton Hewitt coach, Darren Cahill.

And it's not just her serve and return, renowned Cahill traits, she has been concentrating on.

"I've been working on everything with him. He's been fantastic and what a privilege to be able to work with him on the court," Hantuchova said yesterday.

"I can't say enough how thankful I am for that opportunity. There's so many things he can add to my game and his experiences are just fantastic.

"I'm really enjoying every day practising with him."

As fourth seed, Hantuchova fell in the first round in Brisbane last year, the second round in Sydney and the third in Melbourne.

"We'll see what happens this year," she said.

"My preparation's been great. I've worked really hard and I'm injury free. I'm a completely different player. I really know what I want to do on the court and I'm really going for it."

Article from The Australian