

Wilander in passion show

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John Roberts reports from Paris

MATS WILANDER will again have to overcome a local favourite and a partisan crowd if he is to win the second leg of a grand slam in the final of the French Open here tomorrow. In Australia it was Pat Cash and the roar of Flinders Park. In Paris it is Henri Leconte, and passions held in reserve since Yannick Noah relieved Wilander of the title five years ago.

If yesterday's events are a guide, Wilander will cope as he always does, calmly and efficiently. This is how he handled the situation when spectators squealed their delight at the impressive shots and comic antics of Andre Agassi in the semi-finals.

A patch of red clay on the backside of his denim shorts and the mischievous grin on his face gave Agassi the look of a small boy who had spent the afternoon playing

in a sand pit. He could not have enjoyed himself more if he had, tapping his racket in appreciation of his opponent's shots, even when they cost him dearly, walking to the baseline under an umbrella when the drizzle came, pretending to offer a linesman a bribe after a disputed call, and bowing low in response to a standing ovation after squaring his match at two sets all.

Agassi is a bundle of fun. But kids who spend a long time playing in the sand tend to get very tired and need to be tucked into to bed earlier than they had planned. This is precisely what happened to the 18-year-old hope of American tennis when the match went into a fifth set.

Small boys do not easily ruffle Wilander, who, at 23, is probably the oldest young man in the world. When the Swede contin-

ued to hit his measured shots to the corners of the court after 3 hours 25 minutes, Agassi became Nogassi, as the score shows: 4-6, 6-2, 7-5, 5-7, 6-0. The kill took only 25 minutes, Wilander winning 18 of the last 20 points.

"Mats makes you work," Agassi said. "I don't have problems keeping up the pace of my shots. It's my legs. The main reasons I lost were experience and that physically I've got to do a lot more growing to become stronger." For this reason, Wimbledon will have to wait another year to see Agassi's smile again. He intends to return home to Las Vegas to rest before resuming training.

Wilander is not so sure the American will be able to sustain the clowning: "It is new. It is great for the game. It is easy when you are young, but it will be harder as he gets older and pressure increases."