

LAWN TENNIS

Wilander makes his experience tell in fifth set

By John Parsons in Paris

ANDRE AGASSI'S carefree, big-hitting progress to the semi-finals of the French Open came to an abrupt halt yesterday when he simply lacked the strength and experience to resist Mats Wilander in a fifth set.

Wilander, the master of resolute, percentage tennis, and especially five-set matches in Grand Slam tournaments, beat the American 4-6, 6-2, 7-5, 5-7, 6-0 in 3hr 50min.

In tomorrow's final, chasing his third title here, Wilander meets Henri Leconte, the wonderfully exuberant Frenchman who could hardly contain his joy after beating another Swede, Jonas Svensson, Ivan Lendl's conqueror, to reach his first Grand Slam final.

Wilander, who was only 17, a year younger than Agassi and the youngest to conquer Roland Garros when he won here for the first time in 1982, was full of admiration for Agassi's potential and his engaging attitude. "It's very important for tennis that he makes it," he said.

He was equally insistent, however, that "he has to develop a stronger all-round game. He's a hell of a player, he surprised me a lot, I've never met anyone who hits the ball so hard, but he must learn to do different things when his forehand is off."

That was cruelly apparent when Agassi's forehand, which had drawn many gasps of admiration from a crowd, broke down once two break points eluded him in the opening game of the final set.

"Sometimes in the fifth set it comes down to percentage tennis. If you keep playing the same way all the time you're not going to lose many matches," said Wilander who, from 30-30 in the

THE DETAILS

MEN'S SINGLES.— Semi-finals: M Wilander (Sweden) bt A Agassi (US) 4-6, 6-2, 7-5, 5-7, 6-0; H Leconte (France) bt J Svensson (Sweden) 7-6, 6-2, 6-3.

WOMEN'S DOUBLES.— Semi-finals: M Navratilova & P Shriver (US) bt S Graf (W Germany) & G Sabatini (Argentina) 6-2, 7-5.

second game, conceded only two of the remaining 20 points.

During one of several rain flurries which caused distractions, Agassi, renowned for acknowledging fine shots by his opponents, and other instinctive good-natured gestures, borrowed an umbrella from a spectator.

The trouble, as Ilie Nastase discovered, is knowing when the clowning has to stop. Pretending to pay a linesman who had just made a disputed call in his favour did not cause the same universal amusement.

Leconte, who often served magnificently, was too quick and too sharp throughout for an opponent whose only realistic chance was when he netted a forehand volley on a point for the first set.