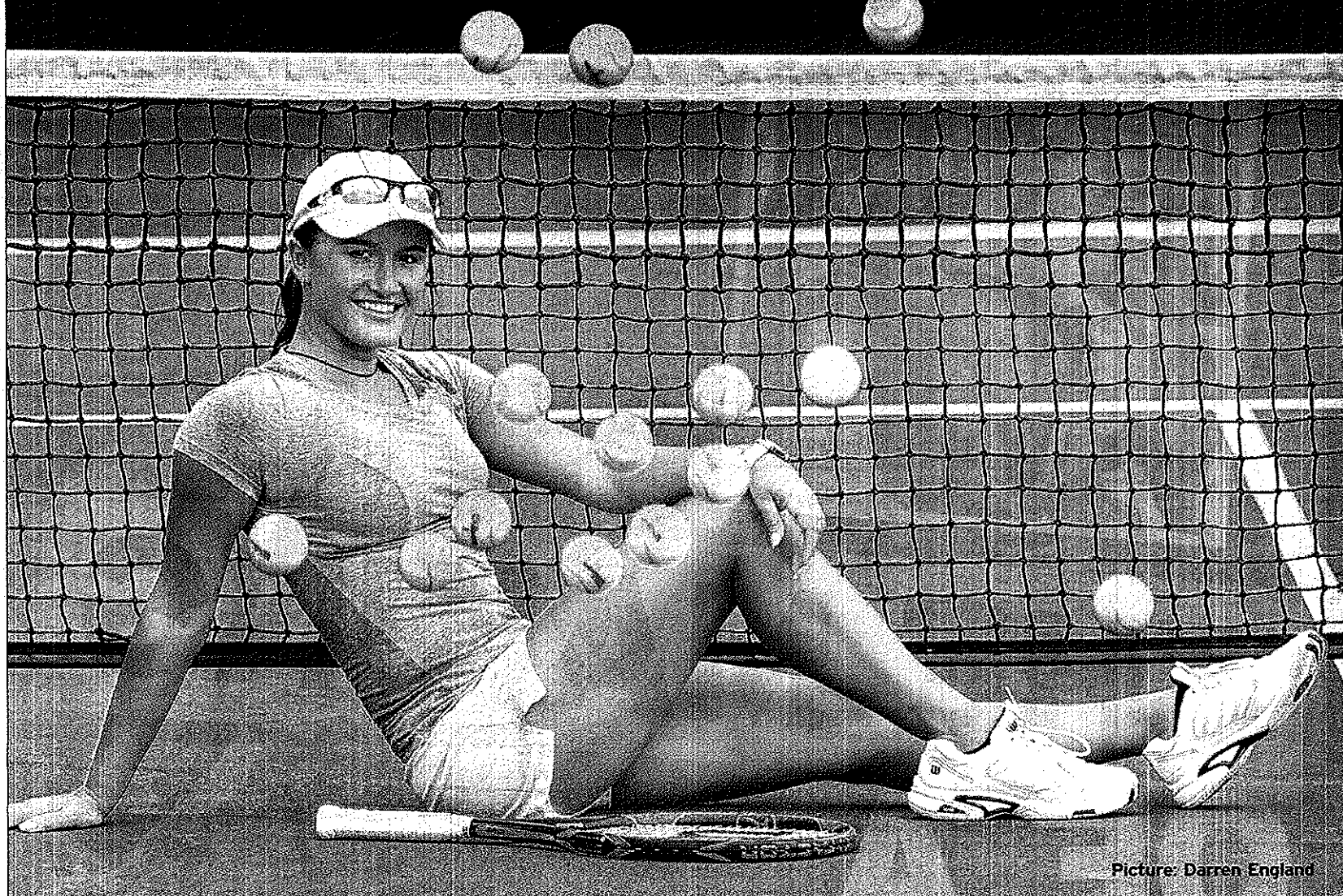


Next Aussie ace

Arina set to arrive from Russia with love



Picture: Darren England

EXCLUSIVE Valerie Baynes TENNIS

THE surname is familiar and the face soon will be too if Arina Rodionova is successful in following big sister Anastasia to Australian citizenship.

Arina is poised to become the latest European import for Australian tennis as she awaits the outcome of a residency application.

Rodionova, ranked No.181 in the world, arrived in Brisbane this week to train with Marc Kimmich at his Pure Tennis Academy.

The 20-year-old Russian expects a smoother path to a new nationality after Anastasia formed part of a test case involving overseas athletes, pilots and oil rig workers that changed the law.

"They've just made it easier for me," the younger Rodionova

told *The Courier-Mail*. "I would be very proud. It feels really good to represent a country you really like."

Anastasia finally secured Australian citizenship in December last year.

The 28-year-old, who is ranked No.64, went on to play a pivotal role in Australia's return to the Fed Cup world group with victory over Ukraine in April.

Earlier this month she won two Commonwealth Games gold medals in the singles and women's doubles, and silver in the mixed doubles.

That followed a five-year wait to become a citizen before rules requiring her to stay in the country for nine months of the year were changed.

As it is impossible for professional athletes and some other workers to spend so much time in Australia and still earn a living, the requirement was cut to three months.

Arina is awaiting a Distinguished Talent Permanent Entry Visa.

If the visa is granted, she will then have to spend three months a year in Australia for the next two years under the new rules before she can apply for citizenship.

"I'm really looking forward to it," Arina said.

"It was a big decision for me and I'm happy that I made it. I love this country, the weather, the people and the food."

Manager Lorne Padman, who is also Anastasia's partner, said the three-month requirement was not a problem.

"She's been here for four off-seasons and she really loves the country," Padman said.

"In other parts of the world, I see her running around with an Australian hat on or an Australian flag on her phone.

"She's got little Koalas hanging off her bag.

'I love this country, the weather, the people and the food'

Arina Rodionova



She embraces the lifestyle and she has many Australian friends on the tour. I'm really excited about the fact she's doing it for the right reasons."

Tennis Australia's tournament director Craig Tiley is watching Arina's progress with interest.

"She's an exciting prospect and obviously her sister has done a great job for Australia at the Commonwealth Games," Tiley said. "She's got time on her side. She has a good understanding of how to play the game and she's also helped a lot by the fact she's got an older sister who's a successful professional tennis player."

After a run of injuries she is keen to have her ranking inside the top 150 by year's end.

She will make her assault on the Australian summer with a series of Pro Tour tournaments starting next month before heading to Melbourne to train with Anastasia and Nicole Pratt.