

## Sweden to pull at heartstrings to lure youngster

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AUSTRALIA may be forced to fend off a Swedish recruiting raid on promising youngster Nick Lindahl, as two of the faded powers of world tennis prepare to jostle for the allegiance of the Swedish-born athlete whose family emigrated to New South Wales when he was three months old.

If Australia's tennis stocks have become seriously depleted in recent years, then Sweden, one of the leading nations of the 1980s, has fallen on even harder times. With Joachim Johansson and Andreas Vinciguerra both having struggled with injury, world No. 8 Robin Soderling is the only Swede in the men's top 200.

Lindahl, ranked 235th, would thus become an instant No. 2. Ola Lindahl, a business consultant, his wife Linda and sons Davis and Nick live in Eleebana, 10 minutes from Newcastle, having migrated from Sweden in 1988.

"Why couldn't he be able to do like Rusedski?" asked Sweden's Davis Cup captain Thomas Enqvist, a reference to the native Canadian with the English mother who represented Britain for the majority of his career. "But it's important where he has his heart."



Nick Lindahl. Photo: Sebastian Costanzo

Enqvist's deputy, Magnus Larsson, also told Scandinavia's biggest-selling newspaper, Stockholm-based *Aftonbladet*: "We're interested. No doubt about that. We're not going to Australia, so the federation will have to act."

Larsson added that contact had been made with Johan Sjogren, the sports director of the Swedish Tennis Federation.

Lindahl could not be contacted yesterday, although his coach, Marc Kimmich, said he was unaware of any approach. Nor was there any comment from Tennis Australia, although the athletic Lindahl is not the type of player it would wish to lose. The 21-year-old went to Switzerland as a hitting partner, or "orange boy" for the Davis Cup team in early 2006, although is yet to earn squad selection and is not considered a contender for the March tie against Taiwan.

A finalist in the Australian Open boys' event in 2006, Lindahl beat Bernard Tomic in a five-set final of the wildcard play-off in December to ensure himself a place in the main draw for the third time, but lost to Finn Jarkko Nieminen while troubled by a shoulder injury in the grand slam's first round. He qualified for the opening tournament of the year in Brisbane, and was granted a wildcard into the Sydney International, having marked his tour-level debut with an upset of John Isner at the 2007 Thailand Open.

Two weeks ago, Soderling, the French Open runner-up was asked at the Kooyong Classic about the flagging fortunes of both Sweden and Australia, and replied that his country's small population was part of the reason it had been difficult to unearth and develop players of the quality of Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander or Stefan Edberg, or even the recently retired pair of Thomas Johansson and Jonas Bjorkman.

"But I think it's going in the right way again and we have a lot of good juniors coming up, so hopefully in a few years' time we have at least a few more guys on tour," Soderling said.

"We had some good success in the past with so many good players ... these players inspired me when I was growing up so I hope I can do the same - inspire kids to start playing."

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