

Hingis puts past aside



AFP, Paris

Martina Hingis, winner of five Grand Slams before she was 20 in the days before the powerful Williams sisters came along to defy her, was back at Roland Garros this week - but there's no chance of her adding the only Slam singles crown she never won.

Hingis, 22, is a premature retiree having had surgery on damaged ankle ligaments which finally forced her to accept her career is over - and it was as a tourist only that she visited the French Open on Monday with horse riding, rather than racket-wielding, now her main sporting interest.

"Everybody is asking after me. 'What are you doing these days?' It's nice for me - now I'm no longer in competition with anyone," Hingis told L'Equipe.

The Swiss miss twice was a finalist here - in 1997, then again in 1999, when she lost a commanding lead against German legend Steffi Graf. That prompted on-court tears and a tantrum - and it was only her mother who persuaded her to return for the winner's ceremony.

That kind of heartache is now in the past.

"It's very moving to come back here and see the Centre Court, talk to the players and drink in the atmosphere.

"I played here eight to ten years - I know all about it. It's nice to come back three or four days - but for me that chapter of my life is closed. I can't play any more. Life goes on.

"Now I just play a couple of times a week, purely for fun. I don't train at all."

Hingis now goes riding on her horse Laetitia - more difficult to deal with than a racquet.

"It's easy to leave a racquet in the corner for a few days - but not a horse."

In response to whether she might just try a comeback Hingis was adamant she would not.

"Physically for me it's not possible."

"The decision I took at the end of last year to retire was one I had duly reflected upon. I live in the future and not the past."

"Now I live my life like a normal person - I have more intimacy."

"I met Kim Clijsters and Lleyton Hewitt yesterday on the Champs Elysees in an ice cream parlour and we fell into each others arms."

Asked if she might just try a spot of mixed doubles here, Hingis hesitated.

"Just for fun, okay - I haven't got my return ticket yet! No I'm joking - I'm going back in a couple of days."



MARY PIERCE

Au revoir



INTERNET, Paris

Just like last year, Mary Pierce came into this year's French Open with little match practice behind her.

Pierce was very soon 0-3 down in the first set and responded by charging the net in an attempt to destabilise her younger adversary.

The tactic partially worked, as it helped her to win two games, but was not enough to prevent her losing the set 2-6 in 30 minutes.

Clarisa Fernandez, from Argentina, showed no mercy, dispatching the 2000 champion 6-2, 6-3 in just over an hour.

Suzanne Lenglen court was packed for the much-awaited return of prodigal daughter Mary Pierce.

So for the first time in her Roland-Garros singles career, Pierce tasted bitter first-round defeat, and she struggled to hide her disappointment after the match: "I wasn't in the game. Clarisa served well. I am very upset. I'm not discouraged, but this is very tough."

To suffer ignominious first-round failure just three years after her triumph in the final is a bitter pill to swallow but Pierce will be back, and she might achieve glory again were she ever to arrive in Paris on the back of a sustained period of full fitness.

The Bangalore penalty specialist scored three crucial goals for Abahani last year. Besides, Abahani is all set to rope in another India player Christopher, who played for Bangladesh Sporting in the Dhaka League last year.

"But we have agreed in principle not to include any Pakistani players after our bitter experience last year where one player vanished on the morning of a crucial match and another having played a couple of matches went home never to return," said Abahani official Zahidur Rahman.

Zahid also said that former national player Mahabub will be given a full-time coaching position along with Juman Lusa.

Abahani also retained dynamic playmaker Rana along with Nakib and Ashraf Islam.

While Abahani dominated the opening day's bourse, Mohammedan got involved in a power struggle with Mariners over the possession of Taeb-e Noor.

The black and whites desperate to fill the void left by the loss of Tuhin to Abahani finally managed to sign on Taeb, but not before wrestling with the Mariner officials.

Mohammedan though confirmed the services of the energetic Faridpur brothers Isha and Musa Mia along with centre-forward Kamal, Ashiq and Khokon.

At the same time Mohammedan coach Litu said that they were not keen to keep Moududur Rahman Shuvo on their books. The national centre forward is all set to return to his old club Usha.

DU toil, Comilla

Barisal on the other hand bowed out of the meet with two heavy defeats including a 117-run thrashing against Faridpur on Sunday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Dhaka University vs Nilphamari

Argentinean's confidence was reflected in her serve (four aces, 60 per cent of first serves in) and speed around the court, which enabled her to manoeuvre her more illustrious opponent into point-losing positions.

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Things looked more promising for coach René Moller's protege at the start of the second set. She took a 3-1 lead, only to concede five games in a row and hand victory to her opponent.

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Dhaka University vs Nilphamari

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Windies expect Lawson to be back soon

INTERNET, undated

West Indies are hoping fast bowler Jermaine Lawson will be fit to return to action in next month's Test series against Sri Lanka.

The 21-year-old was forced the sit out the seven one-day internationals against Australia because of bulging discs in the lower back.

Lawson's bowling action is under review by the International Cricket Council after he was reported by the umpires during the fourth Test against Australia.

He will fly to Antigua to work with bowling advisors Andy Roberts and Kenny Benjamin once he is able to bowl without discomfort.

"We expect that he will be pain-free in the next week and a half," said West Indies Cricket Board president Wes Hall.

"Lawson has been receiving treatment."

BCCI propounds

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for the series, on the condition that Pakistan are considered notional hosts and given the commercial rights for the series.

Pakistan have twice played home series at neutral venues against West Indies in Sharjah, and against Australia in Colombo and Sharjah. Apart from those two venues, Tangiers in Morocco and Abu Dhabi have been mentioned as possible alternatives for the Indian tour.

If the series does take place, it will be a huge blessing for the cash-strapped PCB. According to estimates, the total revenues from the series could be around 10 million dollars.

4 new marks

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clocking a time of 1 minute 10.02 seconds.

Lovely Khatun of Bangladesh Ansars also set a new mark in the girls 200m individual medley (15-17 years) clocking 3 minutes 01.75 seconds.

Wasul Islam of BKSP set the other record in the 200 freestyle (18-20 years). He clocked 2 minutes 10 seconds. The previous record was 2 minutes 13 seconds.

A total of 16 events were decided on the opening day.

Earlier, State Minister for Youth and Sports M Fazlur Rahman inaugurated the meet in the morning.

Abahani call

FROM PAGE 13

And Abahani, knowing the preoccupations of either Indian or Pakistani players, still decided to rely on their Indian defender Rohan Kiron.

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Raja finds 'discrepancy'



AFP, Karachi

A top Pakistani cricket official on Monday questioned an apparent discrepancy in punishments meted out by the International Cricket Council under its code of conduct.

Rameez Raja, the director of the Pakistan Cricket Board, questioned why fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar was given a two-match suspension for alleged ball tampering in a match last week against New Zealand as part of the teams' tri-series in Sri Lanka.

"I do not want to defend Shoaib Akhtar's acts, which were discouraging to Pakistan cricket, and that too at a time when we are trying to introduce a new culture in the new team. He has been reprimanded and he has shown his remorse."

"But there seemed to be different sets of rules for different players," Raja said in a statement Monday.

SA better off without Zulu



REUTERS, Cape Town

All-rounder Lance Klusener is a disruptive force who can "ruin a team", according to new South Africa captain Graeme Smith.

Smith, at 22 South Africa's youngest ever captain, was quoted on the front page of the Cape Times newspaper on Tuesday following a speech he delivered at a business breakfast the previous day.

Last week Klusener was left out of the South African one-day and Test squads for the tour of England which begins next month.

A poor attitude in the dressing room was widely quoted in South African media as the principle reason for his omission.

"We decided Lance as a team man can only cause hassles and we want to move forward in South African cricket," Smith said at the breakfast.

"To be honest Lance, as fantastic as he is...can sometimes ruin a team."

Biggies move on

FROM PAGE 13

finally ran out of steam as Costa won 6-7, 2-6, 7-5, 6-2, 6-2 in 3hr 38 min to avoid becoming the first defending men's champion ever to crash in the opening round here.

The 27-year-old Costa now meets Radek Stepanek of the Czech Republic.

Ferrero swept past Michel Kratochvil of Switzerland 7-5, 7-5, 6-4 and next meets Chile's Nicolas Massu, who beat Swedish former finalist Magnus Norman 6-4, 6-1, 6-3.

Clijsters explained she and boyfriend Hewitt were in a hurry to get the job done so they can have time together in the world's "most romantic city", having been fortunate to see their matches scheduled closely together.

"We both like to play on the same day so you don't have to hang out on the courts too much - but I get nervous watching him anyway," Clijsters admitted.

She doesn't like to watch herself either, and doesn't indulge in any video post-mortems of matches such as her Australian Open semifinal loss to Serena Williams, where she collapsed in three sets having held two match points at 5-2 in the second set.

Australian pace bowler Glenn McGrath escaped punishment for a finger wagging verbal tirade against West Indian batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan during the Antigua Test in the Caribbean earlier this month.

South African match referee Mike Procter took no action against either player, a move reportedly condemned by current Indian captain Saurav Ganguly and former Pakistan captain Imran Khan.

"Sledging and ball tampering are bracketed under Level 2 offences and it seems strange that while one offence is pursued so seriously another offence goes unnoticed," said Raja.

Television cameras apparently caught Shoaib scratching the ball during Pakistan's league game of the tri-series against New Zealand at Dambulla, Sri Lanka.

Television umpire Gamini Silva brought the action to the attention of match referee Gundappa Vishwanath of India, who did not make his decision to suspend Shoaib and fine him 75 per cent of his match fee until a day later.

"If television is considered a fact-finding mission, then it has to be universally followed as part of the standard playing conditions applicable universally," Raja argued.

"In Shoaib's case, the match referee had relied heavily on television pictures whereas the McGrath-Sarwan case, with televised evidence of a misdemeanour, was deemed not fit for reporting as a Level 2 offence."

Raja also sought to clarify Shoaib's position with regard to speculations that he was caught tampering with the ball.

He said Shoaib's action of scratching or cleaning the ball was considered an attempt of changing the condition of the ball by the match referee.

"Ball tampering is an offence which invokes certain actions which are: a) change of the ball immediately, b) five penalty runs to the opponent. In the case of Shoaib, neither one of these actions were invoked," he said.

Raja said the matter will be discussed at the ICC meetings in London next month.

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Life is tough sans cricket

REUTERS, Melbourne

Shane Warne says he hopes to return to cricket "better than ever" after serving his 12-month doping ban and admits he finds it tough to watch Australia's games on television.

Test cricket's second-leading wicket-taker will be available for selection in February next year and is also considering making a comeback to one-day internationals.

"I still think I have a few good years left in me," the leg-spinner said in an interview on Australian television aired on Monday night.

"I'll use this 12 months wisely, keep myself fit as I am now, come up with a few new deliveries," the 33-year-old added.

"Hopefully I will come back better than ever."

Warne missed Australia's successful World Cup defence in South Africa when he was banned for 12 months in February after testing positive for diuretics.

The Australian announced in January he would retire from one-day internationals after the World Cup test career.

Belarus 6-2, 6-3, 6-1 to set up a meeting with US veteran Todd Martin, a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 conqueror of Argentina's Jose Acasuso.

Henman has a 4-3 record against Martin - but Wimbledon is where his real hopes lie and in beating Voltchkov he saw off a man without a single claycourt victory in five years.

Wimbledon finalist and Argentine eighth seed David Nalbandian moved on with a 6-4, 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 win over Spain's Albert Montanes.

Jelena Dokic, seeded 10, won through in the women's event as she cruised past Angelika Roesch of Germany 6-4, 6-4.

In later matches, Venus Williams, hoping to join sister Serena, her conqueror in last year's final, in the next round, was playing fellow American Samantha Reeves.

Three-time champion Monica Seles was facing Russian Nadia Petrova while 1989 men's champion Michael Chang of the United States, making his farewell visit, was up against Fabrice Santoro of France.

And triple men's champion Gustavo Kuerten, seeded 15, was meeting Swiss veteran Marc Rosset.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

U P M D Y J D P J E V B F T J O P
E P R P J E Q B P E . M O D W C
F T M V P J K W V J U W T V
V W X Y V J X B M Q J K P E E W R .
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IN BELGIUM, I THINK CHILDREN WHO EARN MERIT BADGES ARE KNOWN AS BRUSSELS SCOUTS.
Today's Cryptquip clue: E equals R
The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.