

Dokic ready to end self-exile

AFP, Melbourne

Jelena Dokic is to break her self-imposed exile from Australia to play in next year's Australian Open, it was announced here on Monday.

Dokic, formerly the country's top-ranked player, left Australia following her exit from the 2001 Australian Open when her father accused tournament officials of fixing the draw.

A 17-year-old rising star, she was heavily influenced by her erratic father Damir, who she has since dumped as coach.

Despite blaming the media and Tennis Australia for her problems, she should be welcomed back, Open promoter Paul McNamee said.

"She left as a girl and returns as a woman," McNamee said here on Monday.

"I think she will get a fair go. I would hope and expect that.

"There is a lot of history there but she is a 20-year-old now and has taken control of her career."

McNamee said he was encouraged after speaking with Dokic at this year's US Open.

"I spoke to her in New York and was optimistic and I said at the (tournament) launch I was hopeful she would play but I only saw her name on the entry list a few days ago," he said.

After reaching consecutive quarter-finals in Tokyo and Paris early in the year, Dokic crashed out in the three grand slams she played.

There followed a difficult period of early round losses before a return to form in Zurich in October.

Dokic, ranked No.15 in the world, beat Kim Clijsters in the semi-finals before losing the final to Belgian World No.1 Justine Henin-Hardenne.

WC final

FROM PAGE 13 at Bangalore, where Gilchrist and Hayden put on a century-plus stand to put their team on course for a big total.

"We expect our fast bowlers to do well in the final," conceded Ganguly.

"There is a possibility we will play with three seamers because they have done well in league matches.

"I don't think the toss is very crucial. The important thing is to play really well and beat Australia. It's anybody's game now. I think it will be a keen contest between the two top teams of the world."

India will also have to lift their batting performance against a disciplined Australian attack.

Opener Virender Sehwag's return to form augurs well for the hosts, whose batting left a lot to be desired in two of their three matches against the world champions.

Sehwag slammed a quick-fire 130 in the last league match against New Zealand at Hyderabad on Saturday to set up his team's crucial win.

India can match the devastating Australian opening pair if Sehwag continues to provide valuable support to star batsman Sachin Tendulkar.

The rival openers' performance holds the key to the final on a pitch expected to favour batsmen.

Australian skipper Ricky Ponting said he did not believe past results will have any bearing on the final.

"We've played the last two games outstandingly well, but the last game does not count," he said.

"We'll have to be at our best to beat India in the final. We're confident of winning because we have been playing good cricket.

"Toss is always a factor, but not many things are decided by the toss. We'll have to play well.

"I know there will be 120,000 people supporting them. I know the crowd will be vociferous and hostile and there won't be much support for us, but we know how to keep them quiet."



PHOTO: AFP

PUT CRICKET ASIDE! India cricketers (L-R) Saurav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag play volleyball as part of their practice yesterday ahead of the TVS Cup final against Australia at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta.

Rain forecast at Dambulla



AFP, Dambulla

Bad weather has threatened to ruin the start of the three-match one-day series between England and Sri Lanka here on Tuesday.

Preparations for the maiden day-night international in this central town have been hit by week-long rains and the north-east monsoons show no signs of receding.

Heavy overnight rain left the square at the Rangiri international stadium damp and further showers have been forecast for Tuesday.

The match, originally scheduled to be played during the day, was changed to a day-night game after Sri Lankan cricket authorities last week tested, and cleared, the newly-installed floodlights.

The remaining two one-dayers will also be played under lights at the Premadasa stadium in Colombo on Friday and Sunday.

If play goes ahead uninterrupted on Tuesday, both teams will rely on seamers to exploit the damp, greenish wicket

at the spruced-up venue.

"There is bound to be some moisture on the wicket because there has not been any sunshine to dry the pitch," Sri Lankan captain Marvan Atapattu said.

"The wicket here usually generates a lot of movement and it will be even more now."

The last time a one-day series was played on this ground in May, Sri Lanka were denied a place in the final by New Zealand and Pakistan.

Atapattu said the prevailing conditions were tailor-made for England, who hold a psychological edge over the hosts after winning five of their last seven one-day meetings.

"It would have been ideal to have a dry wicket which favours spin, but there is little we can do about the weather," the Sri Lankan captain said.

England's captain Michael Vaughan, fresh from a successful tour of Bangladesh where the tourists swept both the Test and one-day series, expected a much tougher series in Sri Lanka.

"This is the real test for us," Vaughan said. "Sri Lanka have more experience than us at the top level and are obviously more used to the conditions.

"But we are ready to fight it out."

Vaughan pinned his hopes on all-rounder Andrew Flintoff, who scored three unbeaten half-centuries and grabbed seven wickets in the one-day series in Bangladesh.

"Andrew is a class act and appears in very good touch," he said. "He is a player capable of turning a match around as he showed in Bangladesh."

TEAMS

ENGLAND (from): Michael Vaughan (captain), Marcus Trescothick, Vikram Solanki, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Rizki Clarke, Chris Read, Gareth Batty, Ashley Giles, James Anderson, Richard Johnson, James Kirtley, Ian Blackwell, Andrew Straus, Anthony McGrath.

SRI LANKA (from): Marvan Atapattu (captain), Sanath Jayasuriya, Romesh Kaluwitharana, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Russel Arnold, Chamara Silva, Upul Chandana, Kumar Dharmasena, Chaminda Vaas, Nuwan Zoysa, Nuwan Kulasekera, Dinusha Fernando, Muttiah Muralitharan.

Umpires: Daryl Harper (Australia) and Tyrone Wijewardene (Sri Lanka)

India don't surprise him



AFP, Sydney

India have selected an experienced cricket squad with few surprises for the four-Test series here, Australian captain Steve Waugh said on Monday.

Waugh said the Indian line-up, announced on Sunday, appeared to be a quality side.

"I see they've got five seamers, so obviously they feel as if they need a few quick bowlers in Australia," he said.

"But it's a pretty experienced squad with not too many surprises and they're a quality side so they're going to be hard to beat."

Captain Saurav Ganguly, deputy Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and Venkatesai Laxman form an experienced middle-order, while spin will be in the hands of the seasoned Harbhajan Singh and Anil Kumble.

Left-arm pacemen Zaheer Khan and Ashish Nehra lead India's new-ball attack in the absence of the retired Javagal Srinath, with Ajit Agarkar, Salvi and Pathan providing the support role.

Waugh said he was unsure how many

of Australia's frontline pace attack would be available for the start of the Test series.

However, he said it was good to see Jason Gillespie on the comeback from injury after being named in the South Australian squad to play New South Wales in Adelaide from Tuesday.



STEVE WAUGH

The Indians, who leave for Australia on Friday, will play two warm-up matches before the first Test at the Gabba in Brisbane from December 4.

The second Test will be played in

Adelaide from December 12-16 followed by the third at Melbourne (December 26-30) and the fourth at Sydney (January 2-6).

The team for the subsequent one-day series also featuring Zimbabwe will be named later.

History suggests that India, who have not won a Test series outside the sub-continent since 1986, face a harrowing time in Australia.

They have failed to win a series in seven previous tours of Australia, with the last of their three victories in 28 Tests down under coming way back in 1981 on a rare spinning wicket in Melbourne.

On the last two tours of Australia in 1991-1992 and 1999-2000, India lost seven of their eight Test matches, five of them inside four days.

A different Bashar

FROM PAGE 13 mate Rajin Saleh did one better.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Emirates 27th National Cricket Championship second semifinal between Chittagong and Comilla yesterday:

CHITTAGONG										
Masoom c Hannan b Sumon										7
Al-Shahriar c James b Sumon										17
Azam c Bashar b Sumon										21
Kapali lbw b Sujon										2
Akram b James										15
K Mashud b Hannan										26
Arif b James										7
Baisya c Rana b Wasel										3
Dalim c Rajin b Enamul Sr										11
Arafat lbw b Hannan										0
Sumon not out										0
Extras: (b-1, lb-3, nb-3, w-8)										15
Total: (All out in 45.1 overs)										124
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-46, 3-52, 4-57, 5-82, 6-100, 7-105, 8-124, 9-124.										
COMILLA										
Hannan lbw b Arafat										20
Enamul Sr c Baisya b Masoom										28
Rajin c b Arafat										3
Sumon c Azam b Arafat										2
Bashar not out										46
Wasel c Masoom b Dalim										11
Rana not out										1
Extras: (lb-5, w-8)										13
Total: (For 5 wickets in 46.2 overs)										125
Fall of wickets: 1-29, 2-37, 3-43, 4-86, 5-122.										
Bowler										
	O	M	R	W						
Baisya	9.2	4	15	0						
Sumon	8	0	32	0						
Arafat	10	2	13	3						
Masoom	8	0	24	1						
Dalim	4	0	13	1						
Kapali	7	1	23	0						
Result: Comilla won by five wickets.										

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS			
1 Nightclub in a	34 Gentle soul	53 Killer whale	8 Reacts in horror
Manilow song	36 Census statistic	54 Wasn't colorfast	9 Wag
5 Nest builder's "brick"	38 Third rock from the Sun	55 Playwright David	10 Egyptian bird
9 Triangular sail	40 College deg.	56 Century segment	11 Containers
12 Common rhyme scheme	41 Chocolate treat	DOWN	16 Staff
13 "Stop galloping!"	43 Dash another's hopes, on eBay	1 Songwriter	20 — judiciary
14 Sapporo sash	48 Sense of humor	2 Theater award	22 React to silliness
15 Extremely funny	49 Eminent student	3 Become tiresome	23 Fairy-tale meanie
17 Relatives	50 Sense of humor	4 Demeans	24 Piercing implement
18 Trafalgar admiral	51 Literary collection	5 Dead ringer	25 Feathery accessory
19 Fourth estate	52 Grand-scale	6 Abbott's first baseman	26 Wag
21 TV show set in Stuckeyville		7 Debtor's letters	27 Navy mascot
22 Diets successfully			29 Exist
24 Rudimentary learning			30 Malicious
27 Throttle			35 Satchel
28 Impale			37 Diamond employee
31 Court			39 Allude (to)
32 "— Gang"			40 Purchase
33 Geological period			41 "— Factor"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12						13			14	
15				16					17	
18								19	20	
21			21			22	23			
24	25	26			27			28	29	30
31					32				33	
34			35		36			37		
38				39				40		
41	42							43		44
45						48	49	50		
47					52				53	
54					55				56	

CRYPTOQUIP

"BUFR WOJJ. XMC DP WXO

FZUDAFG CDJYDZO WUDB

BUMAOOYDGH WMYFR?"

"PFZFUD PM IIMMY!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I SAW THE CHEF MAKE A HUGE CROCK OF PASTA SAUCE. IT WAS A STIRRING PERFORMANCE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals S

The Cryptoquip 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.

Kasparov levels with machine

AFP, New York

Chess Grand Master Garry Kasparov won game number three on Sunday against a virtual reality supercomputer "X3D Fritz," tying the score in their four-game challenge at 1.5-to-1.5.

A fourth and final game in the man-versus-machine series will take place at the New York Athletic Club on Tuesday.

Kasparov tied his first game against "X3D Fritz" but lost the second.

The Russian chess champion played wearing 3-D glasses, gazing at a chess board that appears to float in the air. He dictated piece movements with voice commands, and rotated the board with a joystick.

Kasparov is considered the world's best chess player, even though he lost the world champion title to Vladimir Kramnik in 2000. This is his third series against a computer. He lost to Deep Blue in 1997 and tied with Deep Junior in February.

"X3D Fritz" is an upgraded version of "Fritz," the machine which took on Kramnik in Bahrain in 2002, tying him four to four.

Waugh thinks the world of Gillespie

AFP, Adelaide

Australian Test captain Steve Waugh said here Monday he believed compatriot Jason Gillespie was currently the best bowler in world cricket.

Gillespie will return to first-class cricket for South Australia against Waugh's New South Wales (NSW) in a Sheffield Shield match at Adelaide Oval from Tuesday after passing a fitness test.

He bowled 12 overs for 1-25 in his comeback in a weekend club match, his first serious outing since a straining a side muscle in last month's first Test against Zimbabwe in Perth.

Waugh said that from Australia's point of view, he was pleased to see Gillespie back but, as Blues skipper, he hoped NSW did not see too much of him over the next four days.

"Good on him, he's a quality bowler, probably the best bowler in the world at the moment, so we certainly respect him," Waugh told reporters.

"I'm sure he'll do pretty well."

The injury against Zimbabwe was the latest in a string of setbacks for Gillespie, who has missed 32 Tests since making his debut for Australia in 1996-97.

All happening

FROM PAGE 13 match came to life when second-half substitute Khokon struck twice in the space of a minute.

His first goal, a left-footer in the 80th minute, went past the shaky Mohammedan keeper. Sensing that another goal was on the way if he could just shoot on target, Khokon used his other foot to defeat Milon a minute later in the same fashion.

But that was the end of the comeback for Abahani as Mohammedan held their nerve for the remainder.

Yellow cards: Shuvro (Mohammedan), Sandro (Abahani)

TEAMS

MOHAMMEDAN SC: Milon, Shuvro, Jewel, Faisal, Amin Rana (Saurav Raju), Khokon Das, Kaiser, Pappu, Manju, Bakhtiar (Anwar) and Farhad. ABAHANI KC: Nizam (Munna), Kingshuk, Sila Fode, Hassan, Masud Rana, Pranotosh, Joy (Agu), Sandro, Parvez, Ujjal and Rakib (Khokon). Referee: Tajib Hasan.

Kiwi tour

FROM PAGE 13

"The process may be completed tomorrow (Tuesday) afternoon. There will be no further comment from New Zealand Cricket until the process is completed."

The series, arranged to compensate Pakistan for New Zealand's abandoned tour in May last year following a bomb blast outside the team's Karachi hotel, ran into trouble after the team received an e-mail threat from unknown sources.

Cricket officials were reviewing security measures in Pakistan with the assistance of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and through its own security consultant.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), which has threatened to cancel a scheduled tour of New Zealand next month if the Black Caps do not honour their commitments, was hopeful the Kiwis will play the series.

"Both sides have been in constant touch for the last 72 hours and we are hopeful the tour will be salvaged," Hasan said.

"NZC chief executive Martin Snedden has been speaking to us and we are also updating the International Cricket Council over the progress."

Bangladesh and South Africa undertook trouble-free tours of Pakistan earlier this season and India have agreed to visit the arch-rivals in March-April next year for their first Test series in Pakistan in almost 15 years.

Federer finishes Agassi



AFP, Houston

Wimbledon champion Roger Federer completed a dream season with a perfect run through the ATP Masters Cup, overwhelming Andre Agassi 6-3, 6-0, 6-4 here Sunday in a rain-interrupted final.

The 22-year-old Swiss blasted 11 aces past Agassi, the last on match point, to win in just 88 minutes, waiting through a 2 1/2-hour rain delay to take 1.52 million dollars and the year-end number two ranking at the season-ending event.

"It was one of the best matches for me this season," Federer said.

"I'm very happy how the whole year went, especially this tournament. I worked hard this year. You always have ups and downs but I feel this season has been complete."

Federer captured his first Grand Slam crown, won ATP bests of 78 matches and seven titles and reached

my game. It felt like I had no chance out there from early in the match to the end," Agassi said.

"He did what he needed to do but he probably even could have played better."

The 33-year-old American came here with questions after a two-month layoff following his loss in the US Open semi-finals and departed more confident that he can be a threat in 2004, starting with an Australian Open title defence.

"I felt like every time I had questions to answer, I did," Agassi said.

"It has been a hard week. It has been a lot of tennis after two months of not playing. I anticipate and plan on being better in Australia than I was here."

Peter Lundgren, Federer's Swedish coach, wants to trim his pupil's schedule a bit next year but looks with confidence to Federer's chances in January's Australian Open.

"He can still be stronger, work on his serve, be more consistent in every match. He can improve," Lundgren said.



PHOTO: AFP

Roger Federer of Switzerland holds the Masters Cup trophy after defeating Andre Agassi in the final on November 16.

world number one, then romped through a field of the world's top eight players.

"What a year -- seven titles, my first Grand Slam, number one in the world," Federer said.

"It has really been an unbelievable year for me."

Agassi managed only 13 winners, one-third Federer's final total, and never earned a break-point chance. Agassi, fatigued from a semifinal victory