

Rennes go Dutch on Melchiot

AFP, Rennes

Birmingham manager Steve Bruce's hopes of holding on to former Dutch international defender Mario Melchiot were dashed on Wednesday when French side Rennes announced they had signed him on a one-year deal.

The 28-year-old moved to St Andrews from Chelsea and had another year to run on his existing contract with Bruce's Championship outfit.

Rennes, who have lost key players Swiss international striker Alexander Frei to Bayern Munich and Swedish international midfielder Kim Källstrom to French champions Lyon, have already welcomed new arrivals Daniel Moreira from Toulouse and Bruno Cheyrou from Bordeaux.

Rennes, who previously saw former keeper Petr Cech move to Chelsea, are in danger of seeing the Czech international's replacement Andreas Isaksson also end up in the Premiership with Charlton putting together a two million euro offer for the Swede's services.

With a view to finding Isaksson's replacement Rennes have shown interest in veteran France keeper Fabien Barthez, who is a free agent after leaving Marseille.

Hargreaves eyes Premiership move

AFP, London

Bayern Munich midfielder Owen Hargreaves has revealed that he was keen on a move to the Premiership.

The 25-year-old was one of England's top performers in the World Cup as the team were eliminated on penalties by Portugal in the quarterfinals.

Although Hargreaves is enjoying the Bundesliga he admitted that he would ultimately like a play at home in England.

"I'm still only young and I have been fortunate to have had a lot of great experience at a great club, one of the best in Europe, but getting the opportunity to play at one of the top teams in the Premiership would be great for me," he said.

Hargreaves felt the team and management should take an equal share of the blame for England's lacklustre performances in the World Cup.

"Any time you are judged on what you achieve and possibly what you have not achieved. We never really hit our stride," he told BBC Radio Five Live.

"Everyone is responsible and involved. If you lose on penalties then everything is more negative. If we had made the semi-finals then everything would be great, but it wasn't the case so everyone is asking questions."

Proteas

FROM PAGE 21

priority. "It would be nice to get to 400 at some stage. I am not sure I can get the six here," the 33-year-old said. "It's more important to help the team do well in the match."

South Africa are looking to opening batsman Herschelle Gibbs to come good after he made 19 and 18 in the first Test to prolong his batting slump.

Gibbs, who was dropped for the home series against New Zealand in April, has averaged 26.5 in his last 14 Tests. He is now expected to deliver as South Africa attempts a series-levelling win.

There was a glimmer of hope when South Africa lasted 157.2 overs in the second innings of the

first Test to make 434 after being shot out for a meagre 169 on the opening day.

SQUADS

SOUTH AFRICA (likely): Ashwell Prince (captain), Herschelle Gibbs, Hashim Amla, Jacques Rudolph, See page 22 col1AB de Villiers, Mark Boucher, Andrew Hall, Shaun Pollock, Nicky Boje, Makhaya Ntini, Dale Steyn.

SRI LANKA (from): Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Upul Tharanga, Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara, Tillekeratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Prasanna Jayawardene, Chaminda Vaas, Farveez Maharoof, Lasith Malinga, Dilhara Fernando, Muttiah Muralidaran, Malinga Bandara.

Unhappy booters

FROM PAGE 21

"The works at the BNS will start within a few days and we have got the assurance that the National Sports Council will hand over the venue to us by October. So there would be no problem to start the Pro League in November and the transfer from September," he added.

Marcus looks to elevate



AFP, Leeds

Marcus Trescothick is hoping for yet more success at Headingley as England look to wrap up their Test series against Pakistan when the third leg of the campaign starts Friday at the Leeds venue.

England have scored six hundreds while building a 1-0 lead in the four-match contest but opening batsman Trescothick has yet to reach three figures.

The Somerset left-hander has managed just a meagre 39 runs from his three innings so far but is now arriving at a ground where he has previously enjoyed plenty of success while on England duty, having scored consecutive one-day hundreds there as well as a Test century, on his last visit, against New Zealand in 2004.

"Of course I want to get runs every time I go out to bat so it is not an ideal situation," said the 30-year-old Trescothick.

"I have not seen it as I would

have liked to over the last couple of games or played as well as I can do -- hopefully it will kick back in this week.

"Some grounds you pick the ball up better, whether this is one of those grounds I don't know but it always seems to work for me here.

"It's always nice when you turn up at a ground knowing the last time you were here you did well."

Trescothick was the only English batsman to reach three figures during England's recent 5-0 one-day series thrashing by Sri Lanka.

But a return to the Test arena had seen Alastair Cook and Ian Bell score two centuries apiece while current captain Andrew Strauss and all-rounder Paul Collingwood both scored a hundred in the drawn series opener at Lord's.

"We harped on about it during the one-day series and we know it's important whatever format of the game you play in," Trescothick, who has scored 14 Test centuries in all, said.

"It is a mental thing to keep converting scores because that is

what really makes the difference, big totals and winning games. It gives your bowlers time to rest and allows them to bowl with men around the bat."

Such was England's dominance at Old Trafford, they won inside three days and Trescothick insisted: "We always knew we didn't need much to get back, we just needed a couple of performances from someone with bat or ball and it would turn around quickly."

"Moving back into Test cricket where our record is a hell of a lot better than in one-dayers made it come back as quickly as we hoped.

"We have to be clinical and tough this week and get straight back into them.

"We've played really well against them twice now and we have got to do the same again.

"You have to be careful when people are wounded because they can bounce back quickly, so we will concentrate on what we have done well in the last two games and replicate it in this one."

Andy beats the heat



AFP, Washington

British teen sensation Andy Murray won his first match under new coach Brad Gilbert, firing 13 aces to beat Paraguay's Ramon Delgado 6-4, 6-3 Wednesday at the 600,000-dollar ATP Washington Classic.

The 19-year-old from Scotland won 26 of 37 first-serve points and blasted 31 winners to only 13 for the 109th-ranked South American, advancing to the third round of the US Open tune-up event after just 88 minutes in sweltering heat.

But Murray only managed a "C" grade in Gilbert's eyes.

"He said I played a tentative service game at 5-2 in the second set," Murray said. "I was maybe a little too defensive with the weather."

"Working with a new coach, it's always a little difficult. You always want to impress him. I was just glad to get through. I think he was grading me on the American scale."

Gilbert simply did not like how Murray finished off a match that should have come easier. Murray took the only break of the first set in the fifth game then broke Delgado four times in the second

set but surrendered his own serve twice.

"He had his guy down and tired and let him back in a couple games," Gilbert said. "The best thing in life is to win with a C. That keeps you around in the tournament."

Murray, ranked a career-high 35 after a fourth-round run at Wimbledon, split with coach Mark Petchey last year and began working with Gilbert last week.

"The stuff we have done on the court has gone well. We have had fun off the court as well," Murray said.

"I doubt there is anyone better in coaching tactical-wise and that helped me out there, but as far as strokes it will take more than four or five days. I'm sure the week before the US Open we will get a lot of work in."

Gilbert, 45, has coached Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick to Grand Slam titles and world number one status. The retired US player signed a deal with Britain's Lawn Tennis Association to coach prospects, Murray prime among them.

"Everyone thinks I'm a magician -- I can just touch him and everything is going to be great," Gilbert said. "It's hard work. It takes time. It's methodical. It's just getting on the treadmill and going forward."

"He has to get a lot stronger and fitter. You can't get it in five minutes. It's going to take time. It's a journey for the rest of his career."

"He has to get better in a lot of areas. The two I see most are his serve and fitness. If he can get in the top 10 in service games held, you are going to see great things from Andy Murray."

Gilbert, who vowed to make Murray an early riser, has not started a morning workout before 11.

"He hasn't gotten me up too early so far," Murray said. "He wants to get me stronger. I realize I have to do that. I want to put the hard work in. I want to win a Grand Slam and you can't do that in the shape I'm in now."

Patience is tough when British fans and media have high expectations, especially when it comes to Wimbledon.

"You almost feel like they expect a little too much too soon," Murray said. "I didn't crumble under the pressure."

Gilbert had some advice about coping with the intense media spotlight.

"Last I checked they do it in every sport over there," Gilbert said. "Don't get caught up in what they say. Go have fun. Worry about what you are doing and results take care of themselves."



PHOTO: COURTESY

Abahani Supporters' Forum formed a human chain in the city yesterday in demand of reinstating the original names of the stadiums sports facilities across the country. Many venues, named after famous persons including freedom fighters and national leaders, have been renamed by the National Sports Council over the years.

Strauss wary of Pak wrath

FROM PAGE 21

"Cook's success hasn't really surprised me," said Strauss of his fellow left-hander, "because I saw how he played on his debut and that, said a lot about the guy."

"Although he's a young player he's got an old head on those shoulders and a pretty good technique as well."

Ashes-winning captain Vaughan may have already been ruled out of the return series in Australia starting in November because of his knee injury, but that hasn't stopped Strauss from picking the brains of the Yorkshire batsman, who turned up on crutches at Headingley on Friday.

"He's been a playing here for Yorkshire here this season and got first-hand knowledge of the pitch," Strauss explained.

"He's always been on the end of a phone for me. I'm not ringing him every day but if there are issues that are playing on my mind and Duncan's (England coach Duncan Fletcher's) mind he's a good man to talk to because he's experienced it

all and generally comes out with some pretty sound advice.

Meanwhile Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer remained coy about the composition of his team. "We are going to play six batsmen, one wicket-keeper and four bowlers. But until we tell the players we won't tell you."

"We'll have to play very differently and we need to win this Test to stand a chance of winning this series," former England all-rounder Woolmer added.

"We can bounce back, we have got a reputation for doing that. The team are very determined. They were stung badly by that last performance."

England have seen their spinners take just one wicket in the last 10 years of Headingley Tests but Strauss said emerging left-arm

Monty Panesar, who played a key role with five for 72 in the second innings at Old Trafford, including five of Pakistan's top six, could be a threat in this match too.

"The Old Trafford wicket, there was quite a lot in it for Monty and he

exploited it fantastically.

"But the one thing he has shown in his short career is the ability to keep batsmen quiet and do a supporting role for the seamers."

"If he does that, there's no reason why he can't pick up a few wickets by stopping people scoring."

SQUADS ENGLAND (from): Marcus Trescothick, Andrew Strauss (captain), Alastair Cook, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood, Ian Bell, Chris Read, Sajid Mahmood, Matthew Hoggard, Stephen Harmison, Monty Panesar, Jon Lewis.

PAKISTAN (from): Salman Butt, Shoaib Malik, Taufeeq Umar, Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Inzamamul Haq (captain), Faisal Iqbal, Kamran Akmal, Abdul Razaq, Shahid Afridi, Mohammad Sami, Umar Gul, Danish Kaneria, Samiullah Niazi, Shahid Nazir, Rao Iftikhar Anjum.



PHOTO: AFP

Frenchwoman Mary Pierce returns against Sybille Bammer of Austria during their Acura Classic clash Wednesday at Carlsbad in California.

Court rules against Maria

AP, Miami

A federal judge ruled against tennis star Maria Sharapova on Wednesday, saying a Florida production company was entitled to market a documentary on her despite her agents' attempts to halt distribution.

US District Judge Donald Middlebrooks said Byzantium Productions Inc. was lawful in its production of two films, "Anna's Army" and "Russian Women's Tennis." The documentaries did not violate trademark laws, the judge found.

Jonathan Koch, a Tampa attorney representing Sharapova, said he initially believed there was potential for confusion among consumers that the films were official documentaries. As the litigation progressed, though, he said he changed his mind.

"As we investigated and as the controversy developed we concluded that the commercial significance of the matter did not justify being involved in a lawsuit," Koch said.

The decision means Byzantium, a two-man operation in West Palm Beach, can move forward with plans to distribute its work in Japan and elsewhere, though the filmmakers said the damage had already been done.

Freddie aims to be fit for Ashes

AFP, London

Andrew Flintoff is planning to regain match fitness well before the first Ashes Test against Australia which starts at Brisbane's Gabba ground on November 23.

The 28-year-old England all-rounder, the man selectors want to captain the team in Australia, underwent surgery on his problem left ankle last week.

He is now about to embark on a fitness programme devised by his longstanding fitness trainer Dave Roberts which Flintoff hopes will have him ready in time for the start of England's Ashes defence.

"The timescale is that I'll hopefully be fit to play again 12 weeks after the operation," Flintoff told Thursday's Sun tabloid.

"That means mid or late October which should be plenty of time to be ready for the first Test against Australia on November 23. That's the big target, of course."

Chairman of selectors David Graveney has suggested the England and Wales Cricket Board may try to help Flintoff's recovery by getting him to play grade (club) cricket in Australia but the Lancashire hero said that was still a long way off.

"There's been a lot of talk that I might play some grade cricket in Australia or get a game somewhere else to help regain match fitness," said Flintoff.

"But I'm not looking that far ahead. At the moment, I'm sitting on my couch wearing a big boot and holding a pair of crutches."

Flintoff had been on course to make his England return in the second Test against Pakistan, at his Old Trafford home ground, but broke down with a recurrence of his ankle problems during Lancashire's County match against Kent at Canterbury.

Lara says

FROM PAGE 21

He concluded the letter, dated 31 July: "I hope my unfortunate actions will not in any way deter our march towards further success."

Lara was appointed captain in April after Shivnarine Chanderpaul decided to quit the job.

Belgian lesson for Stosur



AFP, San Diego

Top seed Kim Clijsters won her 12th match in 13 starts, producing a 6-1, 6-2 thrashing of Samantha Stosur to bolt into the third-round of the 1.34-million-dollar WTA event Wednesday.

The Belgian was ruthless in the 39th-minute demolition of the 39th-ranked Australian, joining holder Mary Pierce in getting off to a winning start after a bye at this costal golf resort.

Clijsters won both of her Fed Cup matches against the US last month and lifted the first title of the summer hardcourt season last weekend in northern California at Stanford.

Sixth seed Pierce had to struggle for more than two and a half hours before squeezing out a 6-1, 6-7, 7-6 victory over Sybille Bammer.

The 2000 Roland Garros champion was playing for the first time since suffering a right foot partial tendon tear in February. Her last match was the Paris indoor final, which she lost to Amelie Mauresmo.

Clijsters couldn't have been more pleased with her one-way rout.

"It's nice to keep playing my best tennis. I knew I had to be on my toes today, she can play well and I know her game can be tough."

"I'm very pleased to have gotten out in two sets."

Nadia Petrova's return after two months away with a hip problem fell well short as the Russian third seed lost badly to compatriot Anna Chakvetadze 6-3, 6-7, 6-2.

"I couldn't do anything, it was all

errors for me," lamented Petrova, who last played in a first-round defeat at the French Open in late May.

Clijsters has been on a tear since Wimbledon, her only loss coming to rival Justine Henin-Hardenne in the grass-court semifinals.

She next plays Jelena Jankovic, who beat Alana Bondarenko of Ukraine 6-1, 7-6. Another Serb, 14th seeded Ana Ivanovic dispatched 33-year-old American Amy Frazier 6-3, 6-2.

Pierce looked the look of her game after her long injury absence.

"It was a good start, I didn't know what to expect. "There's not much missing from my game."

The 31-year-old added: "I can't remember when I was so happy and excited to be back on court competing again. I competed really well, my game felt okay."

The Frenchwoman had to struggle after missing a chance to close out a straight-sets win as she went wrong on three match points.

Forced into a concluding third set she then had to recover from a break before levelling at 5-all against Bammer, ranked 46th.

Pierce recovered her poise in the tiebreaker, earning the hard-fought win on her fourth opportunity of a long afternoon.

"Missing those match points was a matter of two or three weeks of training," said Pierce. "This match was what I had expected."

"In the second set, my energy level dropped. But I was doing the best with what I had. I need matches and training, the US Open is my goal."

Russian fourth seed Elena Dementieva got on and off court with efficiency in a 6-2, 6-2 thrashing

of American Ashley Harkleroad while Slovak 11th seed Daniela Hantuchova beat Olga Savchuk of Ukraine 6-2, 6-4.

Vera Zvonareva advanced when China's Peng Shuai was unable to continue because of heat exhaustion, handing the Russian a 3-6, 7-6, ret, win.

"I could see she was having problems with the heat," said Zvonareva, winner of two titles since June including Cincinnati last month. "I felt fine and wasn't thinking about the weather."

Finn Emma Laine lined up a Thursday clash with Pierce after winning the longest match of her career, a three-hour, 20-minute marathon over Elena Vesnina 6-7, 7-6, 6-4 in which both women required treatment on court.

Pak trio

FROM PAGE 24

need plenty more cricket before the Rawalpindi Express, who took 17 wickets during Pakistan's 2-0 victory in a three-Test home series against England late last year, was fit for an international comeback.

"We want him to bowl at least eight full days of cricket before we can make any sort of statement about whether he will be fit for the last Test match."

England too have had their fair share of injury problems this series with all-rounder Andrew Flintoff (ankle), Ashes-winning captain Michael Vaughan (knee), fast bowler Simon Jones (knee) and left-arm spinner Ashley Giles (hip) all missing.

"We're not making any excuses because we've got injuries," Woolmer insisted. "Test cricket is Test cricket and you can do nothing about it if the guys are unfit to play."



PHOTO: AFP

British youngster Andy Murray serves against Paraguayan Ramon Delgado during their Legg Mason Tennis Classic second round match in Washington DC on Wednesday.