



PHOTO: AFP

Belgian Kim Clijsters is set to make a backhand return towards her opponent Martina Hingis of Switzerland during their match in the Acura Classic on Friday at La Costa Spa and Resort in Carlsbad, California.

Clijsters ousts Hingis



AP, San Diego

Top-seeded Kim Clijsters defeated Martina Hingis 7-5, 6-2 in a sloppy battle of former No. 1 players to advance to the semifinals of the Acura Classic on Friday night.

Clijsters, ranked second in the world, won a fourth first set in which both players made numerous unforced errors. But the Belgian took control in the second set with aggressive play to extend her winning streak to 23 matches in North American summer hardcourt events.

"When you play against Martina, you have to win the points against her," said Clijsters. "She's not a player who's going to hit you off the court. I know that it's up to me to be aggressive and go for the winners. It's also why you take more risks and make more unforced errors."

Clijsters' opponent in Saturday night's semifinal will be Czech teenager Nicole Pietrangeli, a 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 winner over Russia's Anna Chakvetadze.

Second-seeded Maria Sharapova advanced to the other semifinal, routing defending champion Mary Pierce 6-2, 6-3.

Sharapova will face fifth-seeded Patty Schnyder, who beat fourth-seeded Elena Dementieva 6-4, 6-3. Hingis committed 34 unforced errors, while Clijsters had 27. Hingis also hit just 18 winners, compared to 25 for Clijsters.

Clijsters was able to save seven of nine break points she faced. The biggest save came in the sixth game of the first set when Clijsters held a 3-2 lead.

The eight-seeded Hingis was unable to convert on four break points in a game that lasted 15 points before Hingis hit a backhand drop shot wide to put Clijsters ahead 4-2.

Hingis battled back to win the next three games for a 5-4 lead, but Clijsters served out the next game at love to tie the match at 5-all. Clijsters won the final two games to finish off the set.

"You kind of run out of steam when you lose such a set like that," Hingis said.

Clijsters had the only two service breaks in the second set as she completed her third victory over Hingis this year, including wins in the quarterfinals of the Australian and French opens.

"I think I played a good second set," Clijsters said. "But the serve wasn't always where I wanted it to be."

Hingis, who has won five Grand Slam titles, is playing for the first time in three seasons after being sidelined with injuries.

"She puts so much pressure on you all the time," Hingis said. "She doesn't really give you a free point. She's always on top of you."

Sharapova, ranked No. 4, won her third consecutive straight-set match as she overwhelmed Pierce. The Russian teenager ran off seven straight games to overcome a 2-1 first-set deficit and take a 2-0 lead in the second.

"I thought I played solid," said Sharapova, who reached the semis for the eighth time in nine tournaments this season. "After that first break in the second set, I felt pretty much in control."

Sharapova wasted little time dispatching Pierce, who was playing in her third tournament after missing six months with injuries.

"She's always dangerous just because she has all the experience behind her," said Sharapova, the 2004 Wimbledon champ. "Obviously, she has not played a lot, but you really can't worry about that because she can swing freely and hit some big shots."

Pierce, who did not move well throughout the match, played with

her right thigh wrapped, but she called it "preventative."

Schnyder continued her recent hot streak, reaching the semifinals for the third straight week. Schnyder advanced to the semis at Cincinnati, and last week lost to eventual champion Clijsters at the Bank of the West Classic in Stanford, California.

Schnyder knows that she has a tough match waiting against Sharapova, who has one title at Indian Wells to her credit this season.

"She is mentally so tough, she can focus on each point and come up with the big shots on the big points," Schnyder said. "It's a tough one. I have to make her run and move and mix it up again. I know I have a chance."

The seventh-seeded Vaidisova made a solid comeback after dropping the first set, then falling behind 2-0 in the second set.

"I don't think it could have gotten much worse than that," Vaidisova said. "I think it would have been even tougher and a little different story if I was down 3-0 and two breaks."

Vaidisova, ranked 12th, will move into the top 10 next week for the first time. Vaidisova, who lost to the French Open semifinals, lost to Clijsters in the semifinals last week.

Shoaib to play village match

BBC ONLINE, undated

The fastest bowler in the world is turning out for a village cricket team in the West Midlands.

As Pakistan face England in the third Test, their paceman Shoaib Akhtar will be leading the attack for Berkswell.

Akhtar, who is returning from an ankle injury, hopes the match against the St. George's club from Telford, Shrops, will help him be fit for the fourth Test.

Pakistani coach Bob Woolmer said: "We want him to bowl at full speed - so good luck to the poor blokes."

Berkswell signed up the 30-year-old bowler, who is nicknamed the Rawalpindi Express, as an overseas player thanks to club captain Dominic Ostler who played under Woolmer for Warwickshire during the 1990s.

Berkswell club member Paddy Milnes told BBC News they were hoping Akhtar would bowl eight to 10 overs for them.

He said the Shropshire side had taken the addition to the Berkswell squad in good spirit. "They see it as an opportunity, a highlight of their career, to potentially face one of the fastest bowlers in the world," said Milnes.

Akhtar was also drawing the crowds to the village ground.

"We are expecting two to three hundred people," said Milnes. "Normally we can expect one man a cat and a dog."

Akhtar said earlier in the week: "I can't wait to start playing again. I want to get a bit of match practice before the Oval Test."

"I'm building up to bowling at full pace and power and I am getting there."

Williams out of LA Open

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Venus Williams has withdrawn from next week's Los Angeles Open due to a left wrist injury, tournament organisers said on Friday.

"I regret not having the opportunity to compete in Los Angeles where so many of my friends and fans live," Williams said in a statement.

Williams, world-ranked number 32, also withdrew from this week's Acura Classic in San Diego.

She has played only eight tournaments this year and failed to defend her Wimbledon title when she was upset in the third round by Jelena Jankovic.

Williams, who has sustained three separate arm injuries, is now in danger of being unseeded at the US Open.

Williams' sister Serena and former number one Lindsay Davenport are still due to make their returns from injury in Los Angeles.

Agassi withdraws from Toronto

AFP, Toronto

Eight-time Grand Slam champion Andre Agassi has withdrawn from next week's ATP Master Series tournament in Toronto, tournament organisers said Friday.

The decision means one less stop on Agassi's de facto farwell tour of North America, the 36-year-old having announced on the eve of Wimbledon that he would retire after the US Open.

"I regret to inform Toronto that I will not be playing in the Rogers Cup," Agassi said in a statement to tournament director Grant Connell on Friday. "I have many great memories in Canada and wish you continued success. Its a fantastic tournament."

After going public with his plan to retire, Agassi fell in the third round at Wimbledon.

He made it to the quarter-finals of the ATP hardcourt tournament in Los Angeles last week but was stunned in the second round by 246th-ranked Italian Andrea Stoppini in Washington on Tuesday.

Marvan enters

FROM PAGE 17 Each team plays the other twice in the league with the top two teams advancing to the final on August 29.

India, led by Rahul Dravid, are due to arrive here on August 10.

SQUAD

Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Tillekeratne Dilshan, Marvan Atapattu, Chamara Kapugedera, Prasanna Jayawardene, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralidaran, Dilhara Fernando, Lasith Malinga, Malinga Bandara, Ruchira Perera.

Abahani recalls

FROM PAGE 17 Abahani chairman Salman F Rahman, Kazi Shahed Ahmed, Harunur Rashid, ASM Mostofa Kamal, Kazi Abdul Hakim, Shamsuzzaman Bhuiyan, Enam-e-Khoda Julu and Asaduzzaman Badsha were also present in the function.

Iraq's football under assault

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's sports ministry said on Saturday it planned to build 150 small protected sports grounds around Baghdad after several recent bomb attacks killed spectators and some players in this sports-mad country.

The ministry said the grounds would give local teams a place to train and play, as well as to provide grassy surfaces in an arid city more known for its dusty open spaces.

"This is an effort to make public stadiums safe from outside attacks and more safe," a ministry statement said.

On Friday, a suicide car bomber drove his explosive-packed vehicle into a soccer game being watched by policemen and civilians, killing 10 people.

Two days earlier, a pair of bombs planted in a dusty soccer pitch in the predominantly Shiite neighbourhood of Amil exploded in the middle of an evening game, killing 10 people and wounding 15, mostly

young players. Amil is located on the sectarian fault line in west Baghdad, between Sunni and Shiite, and so their sports were targeted.

Days later, little is left of this cherished piece of local property but a twisted tangle of metal seating and an abandoned athletic shoe.

"Just holding a match in a public field has become something dangerous," said Majid Shamus, head of a local football club in central Baghdad's Salihiya neighbourhood.

"We need to build a fence around the fields to protect the match and the players and make more of an effort to watch the roads leading to these playing areas," he said.

Shamus's players practise in a wide open dirt space interspersed with palm trees near the old Olympic headquarters and not far from the fortified Green Zone, seat of Iraq's coalition government and site of the US embassy.

It is also close to the embassy of Iraq's neighbour Iran. In January, a car bomber target-

ing the embassy exploded near their training grounds, peppering the area with metal debris and bits of flesh.

Iraqis are passionate about their sports teams, but this has not protected spectators and sports officials from being engulfed in the chaos and unrest gripping the country.

On July 28, Iraq's national soccer coach Akram Ahmed Salman resigned following death threats and then fled Baghdad for the comparative safety of the Kurdish autonomous region in the north of the country.

"The reason for the threat is not because of the performance of the team or my work with them, but because of my links to the Iraqi sports federation," he told AFP at the time.

"I am paying the price for the rivalries between various sports officials.

"The team needs a proper atmosphere in which to train, but now there is violence all around us that can strike at any time," he added.

Greg tells boys to be serious



PTI, Bangalore

Indian cricket coach Greg Chappell has sought to put his players on notice ahead of important tournaments leading to the World Cup, saying any complacency on their part will leave the door open for others to sneak into the side.

Chappell said anyone who could "offer something" to the team would be considered for selection and pointed out Dinesh Mongia's return for the upcoming tri-series in Sri Lanka as an example.

"They (players) will select themselves in or select themselves out just on their performances. We need to be vigilant as a group and each of the players has to be vigilant as an individual and make sure they don't get complacent and leave the door open for someone else," the former

Australian captain said.

"You look at anyone that can offer something to the team. The minute you close your eyes or shut the door on someone you can make a mistake. We have to be open-minded and use all of the resources that we've got," he told 'cricinfo' website.

Chappell's comments could sound music to players like Zaheer Khan and Sourav Ganguly, seeking to make a comeback to the side after falling out of favour with selectors.

Chappell said the message from the selection of Mongia, making a comeback after one year in wilderness, was that no-one was totally out of the team and no-one's totally in.

"We probably have something like 25 players to choose from and that is a healthy position to be in. Obviously they can't all play at once and some are going to miss out. I suppose the message from Mongia's selection is that no-one is totally out of it and no-one's totally in."

Magnini claims 100m title

FROM PAGE 20

Nystrand, who managed 48.91, was delighted with his second spot. "I hope I have changed my reputation of being just a short course swimmer," Nystrand said. "I knew I had a chance of winning a medal and I took it."

Van den Hoogenband, who also won the Sydney Olympics 200m title, said he was happy to have gone under the 49sec barrier (48.94) following back surgery last year.

"It was a difficult final," said van den Hoogenband. The Dutch star said he had not been expecting anything from the 100m despite taking the 200m freestyle crown earlier in the week.

"It was great to be on the podium and I'm happy I won the 200m freestyle. This medal was a bonus."

Russian Yury Prilukov earned his second gold medal of the championships, winning the men's 1,500m freestyle in 14min 51.93sec, ahead

of Frenchmen Sebastien Rouault and Nicolas Rostoucher.

Prilukov, the short course world champion over the distance, had already won the 400m freestyle and Rostoucher had finished third in the 400m event.

Prilukov said he had sights on doing the European double in the 1,500m event. "I hope to also become European short course champion in Helsinki (in December)," he said.

"Then next year I will concentrate on the world championships in Melbourne where I will try to win my first gold medal in the big pool."

In women's events, Britain's Kirsty Balfour won the 200m breaststroke in 2min 25.48sec ahead of Ukrainian Yuliya Pidlisna and Agnes Kovacs of Hungary, and Inge Dekker of the Netherlands won the 100m butterfly ahead of holder Martina Moravcova of Slovakia and France's Alena Popchanka.

WICB names

FROM PAGE 17

representative Deryck Murray broke down.

Brian Lara was retained as captain. Earlier this week the left-hander tendered a public apology for his outburst on selection policies after the final Test defeat to India last month which handed the visitors their first series win in the Caribbean in 35 years.

"I recognise that I broke the confidence placed in me as West Indies captain by my overreaction during and after the fourth Test against India and I apologise to all concerned," he said in a statement.

SQUAD

Brian Lara (captain), Ramnaresh Sarwan, Chris Gayle, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Runako Morton, Dwayne Bravo, Dwayne Smith, Carlton Baugh, Corey Collymore, Fidel Edwards, Ian Bradshaw, Jerome Taylor, Marlon Samuels, Wavell Hinds.

Bell belts

FROM PAGE 17

Younis not out 15
Yousuf not out 11
Extras: (lb-8, w-3, nb-2) 13
Total: (For 2 wkts in 19 overs) 66
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-36

To bat: Inzamamul Haq, Faisal Iqbal, Kamran Akmal, Mohammad Sami, Shahid Nazir, Umar Gul, Danish Kaneria

Bowler O M R W
Hoggard 7 1 19 1
Harrison 8 0 21 0
Mahmood 4 2 18 0

Toss: England
Umpires: Darrell Hair (AUS), Billy Doctrove (WIS)
TV umpire: Nigel Llong (ENG)
Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)

Juve angry

FROM PAGE 20

The exodus was triggered by Juventus' demotion to the second division after the club were found guilty of rigging matches in the 2004-05 season. They were also stripped of the title they won last season.

According to Italian media reports, AC Milan -- another of the clubs found guilty of match rigging but who were punished less severely -- head the queue to sign Ibrahimovic who joined Juve from Dutch giants Ajax in August 2004.

A Clement record



INTERNET, undated

For the first time in his career, Arnaud Clement was able to outplay Lleyton Hewitt.

The 11th seed from France, Clement upset the third-seeded Australian, 7-6, 6-4, on Friday to reach the semifinals of the 600,000-dollar US Open warm-up event.

The winner here in 2004, Hewitt had been 7-1 lifetime against Clement, with the only loss occurring in a walkover.

Clement will face Russian Marat Safin in the semifinals.

Safin moved on with a hard-fought 7-6, 7-6 triumph over South African Wesley Moodie. Safin had upset top seed James Blake on Thursday night.

In the bottom half, eighth seed Andy Murray of Great Britain easily defeated the last remaining American, No. 16 Mardy Fish, 6-2, 6-4.

"I didn't play too well on hardcourts at the start of the year," Murray said. "I got five good days of practice in and was maybe rusty in my first game but I've been getting better. Today was my best. I think the second set was the best six games I've played."

Murray is playing his first tournament under new coach Brad Gilbert, who guided Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick to Grand Slam titles and the top of the world rankings.

"Brad and I spoke at the end of the match," Murray said. "He was disappointed, though I got tentative at the end. I still thought I was playing good tennis."

"I don't think I am a better tennis

player yet. But technically, I'm getting there. My game isn't that much better yet but I'm gaining confidence."

Murray, who looked up to Tim Henman growing up, will not get a chance to face the Brit in the semifinals.

Henman was easily beaten by seventh-seeded Russian Dmitry Tursunov, 6-3, 6-2.

"On a night like tonight, sometimes I do wonder," said Henman referring about his will to win. "The way he played, I found myself feeling like a spectator. But I feel good about my own game at this point in the summer."

Henman, who has lost four times to Tursunov since Wimbledon in 2005, failed to muster a break of serve against his nemesis.

Andy not sure yet



REUTERS, Washington

With Andy Murray soaring into the Legg Mason Classic semifinals it might be tempting to call his new coach Brad Gilbert a miracle worker.

Murray, however, is not believing that just yet.

"I don't think I'm a better tennis player yet," said the 19-year-old.

Murray has not lost a set on the way to the last four, whipping Mardy Fish 6-2 6-4 on Friday to set up a match against Russian Dmitry Tursunov, the seventh seed.

Gilbert has been mentoring the 6-foot-1, 68-kg Murray for only a week, too soon to have any real impact, according to the British player.

"He is the one that was saying at the start of the week that the changes aren't going to happen overnight," Murray told a news conference. "He won't be able to make a huge difference until toward the end of this year."

"But when you have someone like that in your corner, it gives you more confidence. Tactically, he's very good and he gets me in a good frame of mind going into my matches."

Wright admits being doubted

PTI, New Delhi

Indian cricketers viewed him with understandable "suspicion and doubt" since he was their first foreign coach, says New Zealander John Wright.

Wright, whose book 'Indian Summers' has stirred up a controversy in cricketing circles, says he adopted a positive approach to deal with such suspicions and doubts.

"My interaction with them (players) was positive. When there was suspicion and doubt, it was understandable since I was the first foreign coach ever to be a part of the team," he told Press Trust of India in a telephonic interview.

"They were all performers for their country, proud warriors who viewed with trepidation if a foreigner would be good enough for their team. It would be the same if some foreigner was to coach any other team in world cricket." The former New Zealand captain says despite his fond association with the Indian cricket team, he could not think of taking up the job again.

6x3