

Tendulkar close to full fitness

AFP, Bangalore

India's coach Greg Chappell said Thursday that master batsman Sachin Tendulkar was close to regaining full fitness ahead of the triangular one-day series in Sri Lanka.

"We are confident he will be, if not fully fit, so close to it that it will be satisfactory for everyone," Chappell told reporters before the team's departure for Colombo.

India clash with Sri Lanka on August 16 in their opening match of the three-way tournament, which also features South Africa.

Tendulkar, with world record 35 Test and 39 one-day centuries, returned to the squad after being out of international cricket since March due to shoulder surgery.

He had already skipped a one-day home series against England as well as the tour of the West Indies.

"His fitness is improving every day," said Chappell.

"I thought his batting during the (training) camp here was very good and we have not pushed him very hard at this stage with regard to his fielding, but he is improving every day."

Tendulkar is also the world's leading scorer in the short version of the game with 14,146 runs in 362 matches.

India captain Rahul Dravid said the tri-series was an opportunity for his team to better their record in Sri Lanka.

"We are playing against two very good teams. It is a big challenge but also an opportunity to boost our confidence," said Dravid, whose side were thrashed 4-1 in the West Indies in May.

India have not won a one-day tournament in Sri Lanka in recent times, losing the 2004 Asia Cup final and a triangular series the following year, both times to the hosts.

"The important thing is to score runs on Sri Lankan pitches, which are slow. It is always a challenge because they always play better at home," said Dravid.

"We need to work on certain areas, like batting in the middle order and rotating the strike."

Waugh's wife recovering

REUTERS, Sydney

Steve Waugh's wife Lynette continues to make a good recovery from surgery to remove a blood clot from her brain, the former Australia captain said on Thursday.

Lynette Waugh, 38, had the surgery on Friday after being rushed to a Sydney hospital.

"Lynette's recovery is very pleasing," Steve Waugh said in a joint statement with Charles Teo, the surgeon who carried out the operation.

"So far all investigations into the cause of the haemorrhage have been negative. There are still a few investigations to be carried out.

"Dr Teo suspects the most likely scenario was a spontaneous haemorrhage and one that, hopefully, won't recur in the future.

"The Waugh family would again like to acknowledge the incredible support, goodwill and positive encouragement from the public and the media. It is greatly appreciated," he added.

Low springs

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in. He was part of the pre-World Cup squad but did not make the final cut.

"The injuries (to Mertesacker and Huth) have given him a new chance, he did very well last season and only narrowly missed out on making the final 23," said Low of Friedrich.

The coach is not expecting much from his side, many of whom have only recently returned to training after their World Cup exploits.

"You have to be realistic at this stage of the season. We know full well the players are not on top form."

"For this reason, I consider this match against Sweden as merely a training exercise before the beginning of our European Championships 2008 qualification campaign."

Recent history favours Germany who knocked the Swedes out of the World Cup in the second round. Next month they start their Group D qualifiers with a match against Ireland in Stuttgart.

SQUAD

Goalkeeper: Jens Lehmann (Arsenal/ENG), Timo Hildebrand (Stuttgart)

Defenders: Arne Friedrich (Hertha Berlin), Manuel Friedrich (FSV Mainz), Marcell Jansen (Bor. Monchengladbach), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich), Christoph Metzelder (Bor. Dortmund), Jens Nowotny (Dinamo Zagreb/CRO)

Midfielders: Sebastian Kehl (Bor. Dortmund), Michael Ballack (Chelsea/ENG), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Tim Borowski (Werder Bremen), Torsten Frings (Werder Bremen), Bernd Schneider (Bayer Leverkusen), David Odonkor (Bor. Dortmund), Thomas Hitzlsperger (VfB Stuttgart)

Strikers: Gerald Asamoah (Schalke 04), Mike Hanke (VfL Wolfsburg), Miroslav Klose (Werder Bremen), Lukas Podolski (Bayern Munich), Oliver Neuville (Bor. Monchengladbach)

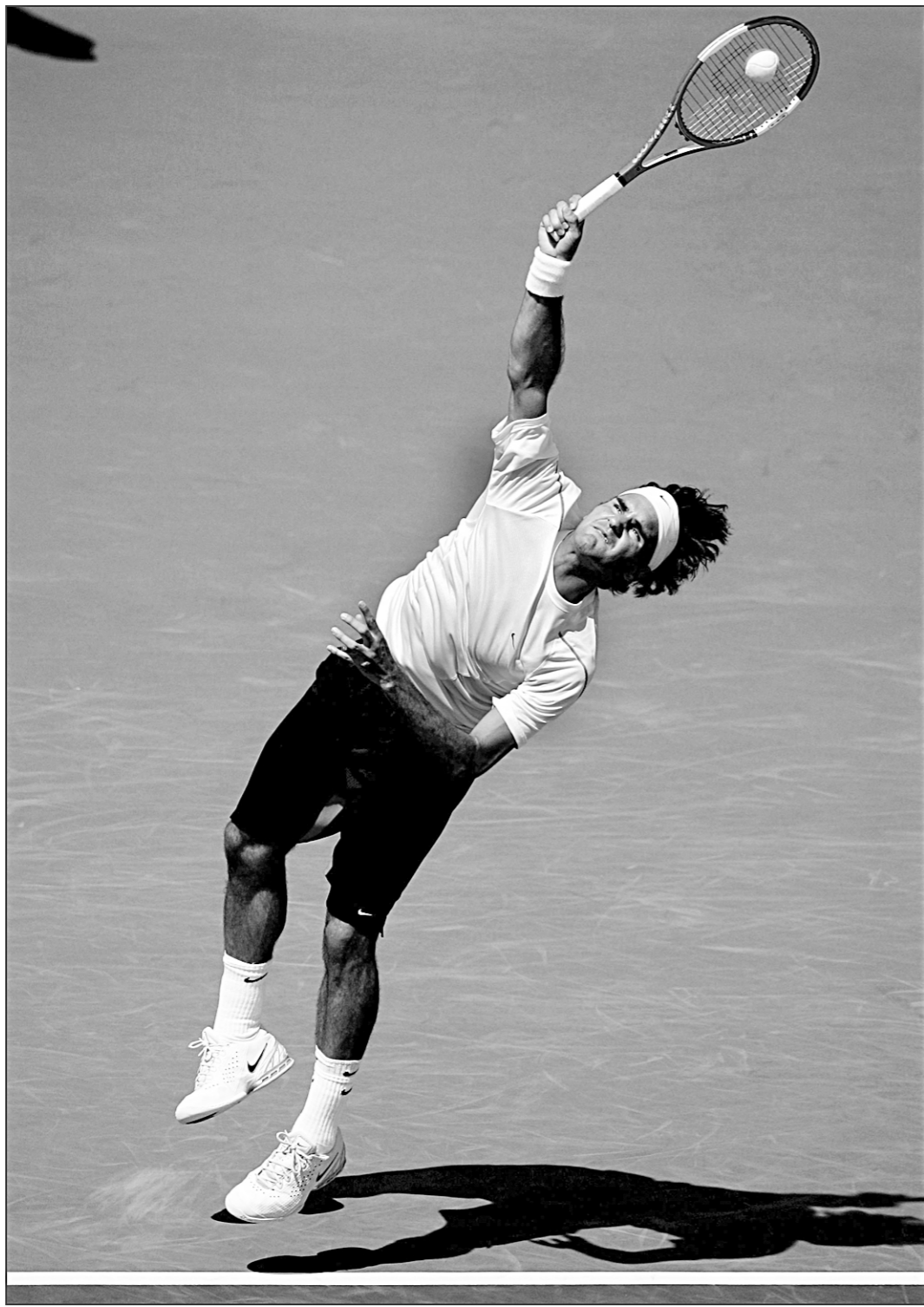


PHOTO: AFP

Switzerland's Roger Federer serves to Sebastien Grosjean of France during their Toronto Masters Series encounter on Wednesday.

Biggies tumble at Toronto

AFP, Toronto

World number one Roger Federer won his 14th match in a row while fifth seed James Blake, Britain's Tim Henman and Australian Leyton Hewitt lost Wednesday at the ATP Masters Series event here.

Federer rolled past France's Sebastien Grosjean 6-3, 6-3 in a second-round match at the 2.45 million-dollar tournament, a warm-up for the US Open which starts later this month.

"It was a great win for me. I was able to be aggressive, serve and volley and come in a little bit," Federer said.

"I was really pleased at the way I played because he's a tough player."

Improving to 58-4 this year, the Wimbledon and Australian Open champion advanced to face Russian Dmitry Tursunov, who avenged a Los Angeles final loss by ousting Germany's Tommy Haas 7-5, 2-6, 6-1.

Scottish 19-year-old prodigy Andy Murray defeated England's Henman 6-2, 7-6 in the "Battle of Britain" while Hewitt was forced out by a right knee injury with Sweden's Thomas Johansson leading 6-3, 3-2.

France's Richard Gasquet staged the day's biggest shocker, ousting American Blake 6-4, 6-3. Also falling was Spanish seventh seed Tommy Robredo, who fell to

Argentina's Jose Acasuso 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Gasquet rated the victory as likely his best since dawning Federer last year at Monte Carlo.

"It's a great performance because I (beat) him here, not on clay court. It was on a hard court here in Toronto, so it's a great performance for me. I played a fantastic match. I am really, really happy to win this match."

Swiss star Federer said he needed only days to recover from his Wimbledon triumph rather than weeks as in past seasons, an encouraging sign as he prepares for the year's final Grand Slam event.

"I've been able to eliminate many matches I would have lost in the past because of mental fatigue," Federer said. "That hardly ever happens anymore because my preparation is so much better."

"I've passed all the tests. It's just now for me to enjoy the tour, try to win as many matches (as I can) because that's what makes me the most happy."

Murray defeated Henman at the Swiss Indoors last year in their only prior ATP meeting and was making it look easy with a 5-2 edge in the second set.

"Having won against him the first time, I felt a little bit more confident this time," Murray said. "I wasn't in awe of him as much as I was the first time I played against him."

"It is difficult because he's a good friend of mine, someone that's helped me a lot. He has given me

good advice. To go out and try and beat them, beat them badly, isn't the easiest thing to do."

But a sluggish Henman revived to win four games in a row to lead 6-5 and serve for the set.

"I was beginning to change the momentum," Henman said. "Andy had dominated the early part of the match and gotten himself into a good position. At that stage I was going to throw caution to the wind and just go with my shots."

"I actually played some good tennis then."

Murray broke to force the tie-breaker in an emotional game that saw a bag blowing in the wind halt one point and Henman net a volley with an open court yawning before him to blow a chance at a third set.

"It would have been good if I could have got it to a set all," Henman said. "Obviously missing a shot that is pretty basic, it's a shot I shouldn't miss, wouldn't normally miss. To miss it on a set point was pretty costly."

Murray, a runner-up last week at Washington, dominated the tie-breaker, closing out Henman on a backhand winner to book a date with Spain's Carlos Moya.

Fourth seed Ivan Ljubicic of Croatia advanced by defeating France's Arnaud Clement, a winner last week in Washington, by 7-6, 6-4. Thailand's Paradorn Srichaphan was ousted by Belgian Xavier Malisse 7-6, 6-3.

South Korea's Lee Hyung-Taik was the latest victim of Spanish star Rafael Nadal, losing 6-4, 6-3.

Women kabaddi team off to Kolkata

UNB, Dhaka

A 12-member Bangladesh women's kabaddi team left Dhaka for Kolkata yesterday morning to play some preparation matches ahead of the 10th SA Games that officially begin in Colombo on August 18.

The team, comprising 10 players and two officials, will compete in the Games kabaddi competition along with India, Nepal and hosts Sri Lanka. They will play their first preparation match in Kolkata against the West Bengal Kabaddi Association today.

After the last preparation match in the South Indian city of Chennai, they will fly for Colombo on August 18.

The squad: Farhana Sultan, Maleka Parveen, Yasmin Ara, Laboni Chakma, Shahnaz Parveen, Shaheda Akhter, Quamrunnahar, Swapna Parveen, Latika Chakma and Fatema Akhter.

Officials: MA Mannan (manager) and Subimal Chandra Das (coach).

Panesar not hurt by ODI omission

REUTERS, Luton

England spin bowler Monty Panesar said on Thursday he was not upset at being left out of the one-day international squad for the ICC Champions Trophy in India later this year despite his recent Test heroics.

"Of course, I want to play one-day cricket for England," said the 24-year-old who has taken 16 wickets in the first three matches of the current Test series against Pakistan.

"Definitely. But right now I am just proud to be included and have a chance in the Test team."

"I am very proud of that and I am very grateful that I have been given my opportunity with the Test squad. I am not going to worry about anything else but try to make the most of this opportunity now."

He said also that he was happy to learn that England coach Duncan Fletcher had praised him earlier this week and said he was the best bowler of his type in the world.

"I value what he says very much," said the Northamptonshire left arm who has quickly become a firm crowd favourite after becoming the first Sikh to play for England when he made his debut against India in March.

French surprise

AFP, Gothenburg

Unheralded Yohan Diniz of France sprang a surprise on the fourth day of the European Championships here Thursday, winning the men's 50km walk.

Diniz knocked three-and-a-half minutes off his personal best in completing the course around the streets of Gothenburg in 3hr 41.39min.

Diniz, 27, took the lead with two laps of the course remaining, cruising past long-time leader Trond Nymark of Norway.

Nymark led through to the 20km mark and by 40km, had built up a 38-second lead over Andrei Stsepanchuk of Belarus.

The Belarusian then fell off the pace, with Diniz and Spaniard Jesus Angel Garcia taking up the chase.

Diniz, who changed his walking style after being disqualified at last year's world championships in Helsinki, maintained his pace and soon surged ahead of a tiring field competing in torrential rain.

Russian Yuriy Andronov made a late charge for bronze, overtaking Nymark but just falling short of catching Garcia, who took silver 1:09min behind Diniz.

Diniz's performance handed the French team its third gold medal after Mehdi Baala and Marc Raquil won the 1500m and 400m respectively on Wednesday.

The violent thunderstorm led to the postponement of the second discipline in the men's decathlon, the long jump.

The event is a top biller here, featuring seven of the top 10 from last year's world championships final in Helsinki won by American Bryan Clay.

In the first discipline, the 100m, Belgium's Francois Gourmet recorded the fastest time with 10.75sec for 917 points.

Russian Aleksey Drozdov, 10th in Helsinki, recorded a personal best of 11.05sec for 850 pts in winning his heat ahead of European season leader Romain Barras of France (11.22sec).

Tomas Dvorak of the Czech Republic, who won world gold in 1997, 1999 and 2001 and is now in his final season, posted 11.25sec for 806 pts and compatriot Roman Sebrle, the Olympic champion, ran 10.98sec for 865 pts.

Finals in the evening's session include the 400m, 800m and discus for the women, and the 200m and 400m hurdles for the men.

The decathletes have the shot put, high jump and 400m to contest.

England recall Gough

Cricket

AFP, London

Veteran bowler Darren Gough has been recalled to England's provisional squad named Thursday for the ICC Champions Trophy.

Gough won the last of his 156 one-day caps for his country last summer against Australia before opting out of selection for the winter.

And the player, who turns 36 next month, was overlooked at the start of the season but is included in a 30-man party -- which will be cut to 14 by September 7 -- along with injured trio Andrew Flintoff, Ashley Giles and James Anderson.

There are five uncapped players with Leicestershire fast bowler Stuart Broad, joined by Essex all-rounder Ravi Bopara, veteran Mal Loye, Durham's Graham Onions and Michael Yardy of Sussex.

All those who featured in the one-day whitewashing by Sri Lanka earlier this summer are relieved aside from Worcestershire bowler Kabir Ali.

It was perhaps England's recent results -- they have won just four of their last 19 completed matches -- that persuaded the selectors to consider recalling Gough.

"Darren Gough has been a regular member of the Essex side this season and worked hard to overcome the knee injury which limited his county appearances last summer," said chairman of selectors David Grayman.

"He is performing well for Essex and I am sure he will be seeking to further impress the selectors over

the next few weeks as will all the other pace bowlers in our 30.

"We have kept faith with the bulk of the squad who appeared against Sri Lanka as we feel there were encouraging individual performances in that series despite the disappointing results overall."

In a statement posted on the Essex County Cricket website, Gough said he was still aiming at a World Cup place.

"I'm very pleased," he said. "My performances have been there this season and you can't ignore them."

"This selection keeps my World Cup dream alive and although I'm realistic and know you have to take one month at a time I hope this will ultimately enable me to go to the World Cup -- which has always been my aim."

Flintoff's estimated recovery time from the ankle surgery he underwent late last month was 12 weeks but the selectors have been prudent in keeping their options open should he, Ashley Giles or Ian Blackwell make better than expected progress.

"We have included a number of players who are currently recovering from injury in this provisional squad: James Anderson, Ian Blackwell, Andrew Flintoff, Ashley Giles and Liam Plunkett," said Grayman.

"The medical advice we have received is that there is a good chance that they will be available for the tournament but we will need to review their progress before the squad has to be reduced to 14 on September 7."

Fast bowlers Anderson and Plunkett are likely to get run-outs for their counties before the end of

the season.

Only those named in the initial 30-strong parties are eligible for a tournament viewed as a mini World Cup.

Meanwhile Graveney defended the decision not to include Monty Panesar in the squad.

Left-arm spinner Panesar has been a star performer for the Test side in the series against Pakistan, claiming 16 wickets in all and three for 39 in the second innings at Headingley as England won the series with a match to spare.

But he has not made the squad for the trip to India.

"I'll probably ring him to explain that the door is not completely shut but for him the best thing is if he concentrates on Test cricket," said Graveney.

"Let's see Monty bowl on different kinds of surfaces. He's done exceptionally well but he is the type of bloke who will keep his feet on the ground which is good because the Pakistanis still have a lot to play for."

SQUAD

James Anderson, Ian Bell, Ian Blackwell, Ravi Bopara, Tim Bresnan, Stuart Broad, Andrew Flintoff, Glen Chapple, Rizki Clarke, Paul Collingwood, Alastair Cook, James Dairymple, Ashley Giles, Darren Gough, Stephen Harmison, Matthew Hoggard, Geraint Jones, Ed Joyce, Jon Lewis, Alex Loudon, Mal Loye, Sajid Mahmood, Graham Onions, Kevin Pietersen, Liam Plunkett, Chris Read, Vikram Solanki, Andrew Strauss, Marcus Trescothick, Michael Yardy.

Stosur downs Davenport

Tennis

AFP, California

Samantha Stosur spoiled Lindsay Davenport's return from injury on Wednesday, outlasting the former world number one 6-7, 6-4, 6-3 to reach the third round of this 600,000-dollar WTA US Open tuneup.

Davenport, seeded fourth, was playing for the first time since March, when she revealed she had been diagnosed with a bulging disk in her lower back.

"It stinks," Davenport said of the defeat. "But it is a step forward for me."

While Davenport can only hope her abbreviated preparations for the US Open will be enough, top-seeded Russian Maria Sharapova continued to display solid form heading into the final Grand Slam of the year.

Sharapova, winner of the title at San Diego on Sunday, opened her Los Angeles campaign with a 6-3, 6-1 victory over compatriot Anastasia Rodionova.

The 106th-ranked qualifier surprised Sharapova with a break of serve in the fifth game of the opening set. But it seemed only to galvanize Sharapova, who lost just three points in the next four games as she closed out the set in 28 minutes.

The world No. 4 then cruised through the second set to book a third-round clash with France's Marion Bartoli.

"She swung freely out there at the beginning of the match. It took a few games to get used to the rhythm and the timing," Sharapova said.

"She played a pretty good game when she broke me. After that I stepped it up. I did what I needed to do."

Davenport was under no illusion that she would find the going easy when she returned to competition with less than four weeks of practice under her belt.

She admitted that she was

feeling the strain in her third set, when she dropped her serve three times and double-faulted on match point to hand the win to Stosur, who is better known as half of the top women's doubles team in the world.

"My body started to feel drained as the match went on, which I expected to be the case," Davenport said. "I'm happy at least I felt my body didn't get injured. The back was fine. My arm was just so tired."

Davenport credited Stosur's solid service performance, which included 15 aces, with preventing her from finding any comfort level.

"I certainly served one of my best matches today," Stosur said. "That really got me going. That maybe put a little more pressure on her."

But Stosur acknowledged she could tell that Davenport, a three-time Grand Slam champion, was not at her peak.

"She always hits the ball hard and flat and deep, she still was able to do that," said Stosur, who has won six doubles titles this year with Lisa Raymond, including Roland Garros. "I don't think she was moving very well today. She threw in some double-faults at bad times ... match point ... you kind of don't expect it from a player of her level."

Despite the disappointment, Davenport was cautiously optimistic.

"You certainly don't feel your best after you play a shade of what you feel you can play," Davenport said. "But it's a long road back after any injury."

"Hopefully, the next time you see me I'll be much sharper."

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams continued her progress back from injury with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over Ashley Harkleroad.

Williams is playing just her third tournament of the year -- her second since a six-month injury layoff.

In the third round she'll face seventh-seeded Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova, a 7-6, 6-2 winner over Raymond.

Hantuchova dethroned Williams in the third round of the Australian

Open in January, and the American didn't play again until three weeks ago, when she reached the semifinals in Cincinnati.

With her nagging left knee injury behind her, Williams said she was looking forward to the rematch.

"She was the last person I played before I took the layoff, so I'll be ready," Williams said. "I'm a much better player than I was in Australia. I'm much more fit, I'm much more ready. I'm not struggling physically. It's a whole new ballgame."

Gonzalez spares

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Then came the long frustration of the home crowd, as Liverpool waited for the last moment to seal victory.

Despite numbering in their hundreds, the Haifa fans cheered their team till the end. For many, the match was more than a chance to cheer on their heroes -- it was also an opportunity to take a break from their home city.

Some fans admitted ruefully outside the ground that however much they enjoyed the game, half their mind would remain on friends and family huddling in bomb shelters in Haifa.

"What can I do? I think about them all the time, but life has to continue," one man told AFP standing with his 13-year-old son -- his wife and two daughters still in Haifa.

Defence worry

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from the game for long but has been scored a number of goals in the National Championship. I also have Farhad and Kanchan as backup.

Babloo's four-man midfield will feature Joy, Arman, Matiar Munna and Abul with Asad pressing hard for a place.

"I hope they would be sincere and complete against Qatar," added Babloo.

Qatar will arrive on August 15.



PHOTO: AFP

Russia's Tatyana Lebedeva on her way to win the women's triple jump at the 19th European Athletics Championships at Gothenburg in Sweden on Wednesday.