

Four share the lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master (GM) Ziaur Rahman, International Master (IM) Abdullah Al Rakib, Debraj Chatterjee and Monir Hossain are all locked at the top in the second University of Greenwich FIDE Rating chess tournament at the Chess Federation hall room yesterday.

The four collected maximum two points after their respective games as Zia beat FIDE Master (FM) Reza, Rakib defeated Sagar, Debraj beat FM Nasir.

In the day's section B matches, Taher, Ataur, Masud, Majed, Kajal, Mowla, Jewel and Siddique won their respective games.

Ponting to go unscathed

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Australia captain Ricky Ponting will not be punished following his animated discussion with umpire Mark Benson during the tri-series win over India on Friday.

Ponting appeared to be annoyed when Benson called back India batsman Sachin Tendulkar who had initially been given out caught, only for the English umpire to change his mind.

Ponting has twice been fined in the past year by the International Cricket Council for showing dissent and could be suspended if it happens again.

Match referee Chris Broad said, however, that the umpires had not brought the incident to his attention after the match.

"The umpire made his decision, he then reversed it and I think he actually got it right in the end, so that's where it sits," Ponting told reporters.

"I can't actually talk much about umpires' decisions anyway, but he explained the reason why and we just got on with it from there. I wasn't happy at the time but that was the decision," he added.

Australia will play West Indies in the final on Sunday following their 18-run win over India.

Tigers want

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game at home because the hope of playing Monday's game is bleak. But I don't think lack of match practice is a big issue for the team," said Faruque.

Faruque however was excited with the fact that the team's leading paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortuza is recovering well from his freakish right ankle injury.

The 22-year old newly married bowler, who had twisted his right ankle after falling awkwardly while coming down the stairs, bowled in the nets yesterday with a short run-up without any complaints.

"He (Mashrafe) is improving well and we are hopeful that he can bowl at full strength within three or four days. We are still a little bit concerned over the fitness condition of Rasel (Syed) but we still have time to observe," informed Faruque. Left-arm pacer Syed Rasel, who had an unnecessary venture on his bike when receiving the injury in his right leg, also bowled in the nets yesterday.

Sides hope

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"It has given us a lot of confidence," he said.

Just being in the final is a bonus for the West Indies, whose own middle-order batting is vulnerable and will need something special to cope with Lee and Glenn McGrath. "I am a little happier in the bowling areas but of course there is cause for concern in the batting," acknowledged captain Brian Lara.

"I still have confidence that they can play. Now it is down to the final and I'm hoping that will bring out the best in them."

In their last match against India, Lara elevated Marlon Samuels, Runako Morton and Wavell Hinds up the order to give them a chance to get runs, but will revert to his strongest top four on Sunday.

"I will of course revert back to (Shivnarine) Chanderpaul and Chris (Gayle) and (Ramnaresh) Sarwan and myself in the top four and the experience there hopefully will take the pressure of those lower down," he said.

West Indies coach Bennett King, an Australian, said the performance of the batsmen would make or break it for his side.

"Australia has the ability to bowl sides out with their strike power and make crucial breakthroughs. They also bat very well right through their list to number seven or eight," he said.

"It is all about batting well and making sure you get more runs than the other side. Batting is what wins one-day cricket."

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA: Simon Katich, Shane Watson, Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Michael Hussey, Brad Haddin, Brad Hogg, Brett Lee, Nathan Bracken, Glenn McGrath.

WEST INDIES: Chris Gayle, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Brian Lara (captain), Dwayne Bravo, Wavell Hinds, Runako Morton, Dwayne Smith, Carlton Baugh, Ian Bradshaw, Jerome Taylor.



Diego Maradona cheers on Argentina during their Davis Cup semifinal match against Australia in Buenos Aires on Friday.

USA back on track

Tennis

AFP, Moscow

Bob and Mike Bryan beat Dmitry Tursunov and Mikhail Youzhny 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in Saturday's Davis Cup semifinal to keep alive the United States' hopes of beating Russia.

The win leaves the Americans trailing 2-1 ahead of Sunday's reverse singles. The top-ranked Bryan brothers have lost only once in 10 Davis Cup matches in last year's first round against eventual champions Croatia.

Andy Roddick and James Blake lost their singles matches Friday, putting the United States on the verge of elimination on a sluggish clay court at Olympic Stadium. The last time the U.S. rallied from a 2-0 Davis Cup deficit was in 1934 against Australia.

"Andy and James kept coming up to us and saying, 'Give us a chance, give us another shot, let us redeem ourselves.' And that's kind of what we went into the match thinking all the time," Bob Bryan said.

Chasing the first Davis Cup since 1995, the Bryan brothers broke for a 5-3 lead in the first set, with Youzhny surviving two break points before smashing a lob into the net on the third. Bob Bryan served the next game at love to give the Americans the lead.

Khan scythes at PCB

Cricket

PTI, Karachi

With four days to go for the ICC disciplinary hearing in London, legendary Pakistan all-rounder Imran Khan has said Pakistan had weakened its case in the ball-tampering row by not opting to approach the court in the first place.

Imran, who led Pakistan to the 1992 World Cup, told an Urdu newspaper that the PCB should have gone to court against the International Cricket Council immediately after the controversial fourth Test against England at the Oval.

"Pakistan could have gone to court and asked the ICC to produce evidence of the ball-tampering allegation levelled against our players in the Oval Test. It could have asked the ICC to show the ball in court. This would have also got Hair into trouble," he said.

Pulling up the Board for mishandling the issue, he said, "Shaharyar

Wisdom dawns on BCB

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flatly rejected any influence from the higher level regarding the appointment of Harun.

"We went through a proper process. I interviewed him. His credentials and interview went fine. That's why we picked him (Harun). Of course the president (Ali Asghar) endorsed the recruitment committee's decision and that's why the board issued the press release confirming his appointment," explained Mahbub.

"But having done the investigation on our own way, we have decided not to give the job to this man for the greater interest of our cricket," added the bearded organizer.

Meanwhile, it was a surprising decision for Mahmud who retired from international cricket in February this year after playing 12 Tests and 77 one-day internationals in his long and colourful career.

"I was surprised when Mahbub bhai told me on Friday night that the board have decided to give me the job. What he told me was that the board thought that I am fit for this

With Youzhny serving at 3-3 in the second set, the Wimbledon and Australian Open champions rallied from 30-0 down to break. Serving for the set three games later, Bob Bryan fired two aces to put the Americans up 2-0.

They quickly took the lead in the third set, capitalizing on three unforced errors from Tursunov to break the Russians in the opening game. Four straight errors from Tursunov handed the Americans another break in the seventh game and Mike Bryan closed out the match with an ace.

"When we were up two sets love and a break, we stepped on the pedal a little harder, instead of just cruising out the match," Bob Bryan said.

On Friday, Safin justified his selection by Russian coach Shamil Tarpihchev over higher-ranked teammate Nikolay Davydenko by beating Roddick 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (5). Youzhny then defeated James Blake 7-5, 1-6, 6-1, 7-5.

Tarpihchev had kept the Americans guessing about who would face the Bryans, and eventually opted for Youzhny and Tursunov as initially planned. It was their second loss in the two Davis Cup matches they have played together.

"The (American) guys played well, and when they're pressing you so hard, it's tough. They served perfectly," said Tursunov, who had trouble with his backhand return

after the first set.

Russia, which has not lost at home in 10 years, needs to win one of Sunday's reverse singles matches to secure their first berth in the Davis Cup final since their only title in 2002.

Youzhny is scheduled to face Roddick in the Sunday's first match, with Safin playing Blake in the second, but the choices are subject to change.

The U.S. has rallied from 2-1 down five times.

Two of those recoveries came in 2000, when Andre Agassi and Chris Woodruff won their reverse singles in the first round against Zimbabwe and Pete Sampras clinched the tie against the Czech Republic in the next round after Agassi leveled it 2-2.

In 1981, Roscoe Tanner and John McEnroe won the reverse singles in straight sets against Mexico. The other two U.S. comebacks were in 1961 and 1902.

The semifinal is being played at the same venue where Sampras won all three of his matches on clay in 1995 to help the United States capture its 31st Davis Cup title.

Russia, which has never beaten the United States, beat France in 2002 for its only title.

The winner will face either Australia or Argentina in the final in December.

(PCB Chairman) should have taken a stronger stand on this issue. But the Board didn't deal with the issue properly." Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq is set to attend a hearing on September 27 and 28 in London to defend himself against charges of violating the ICC Code of Conduct.

Imran said the disciplinary hearing would be difficult for Pakistan because Hair will be on strong ground legally and will have the backing of the ICC.

"Hair can say he took the action of changing the ball and penalising the Pakistan team five runs under ICC laws. And if the ICC takes action against him he can take them to court," Imran said.

Meanwhile, PCB has requested former England opener Geoffrey Boycott to back captain Inzamamul Haq at this month's ball-tampering hearing.

The former England opener has been asked by ICC to examine the ball alleged to have been tampered by the Pakistan team during the

fourth Test against England at Oval. Boycott has been requested to stand by Pakistan as cricket authorities of the country respect his knowledge and expertise in the game, the 'Daily Mirror' reported today.

"The former Yorkshire cricketer would argue that Inzamam should be acquitted of the charges of cheating and bringing the game to disrepute," the report said.

The hearing, to be conducted by the International Cricket Council, is scheduled to take place on September 27 and 28.

The row rocked world cricket last month, when Australian umpire Darrell Hair, after consulting with his on-field colleague Billy Doctrove of the West Indies, penalised Pakistan five penalty runs on the charge of ball-tampering.

Protesting the decision, the Pakistani cricketers left the field, which subsequently affected them adversely as the match was forfeited in favour of England.

Squad is right: Vaughan

AFP, London

Injured England captain Michael Vaughan said selecting players not yet fit for the Ashes Tour later this year was the right thing to do.

Andrew Flintoff, Marcus Trescothick and Ashley Giles were named for the tour, with the first match in Canberra on November 10, although they were not completely fit when the squad was announced.

Vaughan, recovering from a knee operation after missing the entire season, fully supported the decision to select players such as Flintoff, Trescothick and Giles.

"I spoke to the selectors quite regularly about the squad and it was one of the easiest Ashes touring parties you could possibly pick," Vaughan told the Yorkshire Post.

"There weren't really any tough decisions and the selectors would not have taken any risks on fitness."

Dravid still has hope

BBC ONLINE, undated

Skipper Rahul Dravid believes India still have a chance of winning the ICC Champions Trophy despite failing to reach tri-series final in Malaysia.

They were eliminated following Friday's 18-run defeat by Australia, when they failed to chase a target of 214.

The team will be under extreme pressure in next month's Champions Trophy as they are the tournament hosts.

"We've got to look at the positives and our bowling and fielding has been really good," Dravid commented.

"Our batting has not done well in this tournament and that's one of the areas of the game we are renowned for and have done well in the past.

"I think it's a matter of time before our batting starts firing again, so we'll be positive and go there (to the Champions Trophy) with a lot of confidence."

Dravid admitted the defeat to Australia was a disappointment but India were always up against it after losing four wickets to the new ball.

Sachin Tendulkar, who had been in excellent form in previous games, was among those dismissed cheaply and although Dinesh Mongia made an unbeaten 63, he did not have the support needed to see them home.

"It is a hard one to stomach. These kind of losses really hurt," said Dravid.

"I think the whole batting order, starting with myself, must stand up and be counted.

"We didn't lose the game because of a poor strategy. The simple thing is that chasing 213 on a good wicket, you just need batsmen to form partnerships and we should really have won the match."

Booters' camp

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Earlier, last Tuesday, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) announced a 22-member preliminary squad.

SQUAD

Aminul Haque, Biplob Bhattacharya, NM Shakil, Rajani Kanta Barman, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Firoz Mahmud Hossain Titu, Mostafa Anwar Hossain, Ariful Islam, Mohiuddin Siraji, Mahmudul Hasan, Wali Faisal, Motiur Rahman Munna, Abul Hossain, Arman Aziz, Faisal Mahmud, Zahid Hossain, Mehedi Hasan Uzzal, Alfaz Ahmed, Ariful Kabir Farhad, Saifur Rahman, Zahid Hasan Emily and M Robin.

Rookies get

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Syed Rasel, Kazi Shahadat Hossain, left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak Raj, and wicket-keeper Mushfiqur Rahim who are also in the rookie contract list.

The committee also decided to extend the players' contract, which was due to expire on September 30 this year, by six to twelve months. It was also decided to increase all players' salaries by 15 per cent.

BCB also agreed, in principle, to form a Benevolent Trust Fund to help cricketers, umpires and scorers associated to cricket.

The trust would start functioning with an initial deposit of one crore Taka.

Hingis cruises

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as she reeled off 11 games in a row. Mirza briefly fought back, forcing breakpoint five times in the fourth game of the second set which saw many long rallies, but Hingis recovered every time to hold serve.

"I'm sorry, I too want to win," Hingis joked with the crowd.

Mirza became the toast of her nation last year after becoming the first Indian to win a WTA title and racing to 31 in the rankings.

However, she has struggled to match that run in 2006 to slip to 70 in the WTA list. Hingis will play Russia's Olga Poutchikova or Uzbek qualifier Roda Tulyaganova in the final.

Hammers

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have been using the last week to mould the team around the former Corinthians duo.

Martin O'Neill has promised to spend carefully any money that Aston Villa's new chairman Randy Lerner makes available in the January transfer window, following speculation that the manager will have a significant windfall at his disposal. O'Neill held talks with the American billionaire this week when he made clear the need to strengthen the squad.

Puskas back

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Puskas has been hospitalised with an Alzheimer-like disease for six years.

Puskas notched 83 goals in 84 appearances for his country, won an Olympic gold medal, and famously scored four goals in Real Madrid's 7-3 demolition of Eintracht Frankfurt in the 1960 European Cup final.

Buchanan gets more backing

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australian cricketers have gone into bat for Test coach John Buchanan amid criticism by champion leg-spinner Shane Warne of his relevance to the team.

British tabloid The Sun quoted Warne this month as saying Buchanan deserved few plaudits for Australia's world cricket domination. He also reportedly suggested the team didn't need a coach at all.

Warne claimed his comments were taken out of context, but audio of a press conference posted on the BBC website last week left no doubt Warne did say Buchanan "over-complicates issues" and has sometimes "lacked a little bit of common-sense".

Warne's former Victorian and Australian team-mate Damien Fleming said the legendary leg-spinner valued coaches noting that Terry Jenner has been Warne's mentor for two decades.

"Warney has been saying what

he thinks about coaches but he's got a very important mentor in Terry Jenner," Fleming told The Australian newspaper on Saturday.

"Coaches and mentors are very important, don't worry about that, whether it is for a team or individual."

Warne and Jenner, a former Australian Test leg-spinner, forged a strong bond from Warne's earliest days at the cricket academy in Adelaide during the late 1980s.

Vice-captain Adam Gilchrist, who is resting from the limited-overs tournament in Malaysia, has no doubt that Buchanan has made an enormous impact on the team during his seven-year reign.

"Some of his methods did confuse some players and I'm sure there are players over time who haven't taken well to the way he works and that's fine -- we're all different people," he told the newspaper.

"I understand that some people might be uncertain about his philosophies but my overriding perception is that as a cricket coach and man manager his overall goal is to better his players as people. With that will

come being better cricketers."

Test opening batsman Justin Langer said Buchanan has laid the groundwork for Australia's remarkable success as a Test and one-day team.

"His greatest strength is his vision and his courage to plant the seed of achievement in a very talented side," Langer told The Australian.

"It's easy to go through the motions but one thing that inspires very good players and successful people is to keep trying to extend them all the time."

Fleming said he admires Buchanan's outstanding work ethic, both in giving players extra practice if they wanted it and in meticulous planning.

A selection process is underway for a new coach after Buchanan announced last month that he is standing down from the job after next year's World Cup in the West Indies.

Europe still on top

Golf

AFP, Straffan, Republic of Ireland

Europe's grip on the Ryder Cup tightened fractionally on Saturday as Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson again failed to fire for the United States.

With the top American pairings of Woods and Jim Furyk and Mickelson and Chris DiMarco both crashing to defeat, it required rookies JJ Henry and Zach Johnson to step up to the plate and ensure that the morning fourballs on the second day were not disastrous for Tom Lehman's team.

Down by two holes at the turn and one down with three to play, Henry and Stewart Cink rallied to claim half a point from Robert Karlsson and Paul Casey, who had to hole a four-footer on the 18th green to avoid defeat.

Johnson, 30, was the outstanding performer on either side, firing seven birdies as he partnered the experienced Scott Verplank to a 2 and 1 victory over Padraig Harrington and Henrik Stenson.

things up.

Sergio Garcia and Jose Maria Olazabal, whose three and two defeat of David Toms and Brett Wetterich was the biggest win on Friday, beat Mickelson and DiMarco by the same margin, extending Garcia's run of Ryder Cup victories to eight straight matches.

The Spaniard has now won 13 of the 18 matches he has played since making his debut as a 19-year-old in 1999.

There was also a second win of the weekend for close friends Darren Clarke and Lee Westwood, who were always on top of Woods and Furyk.

Predictably that match generated the biggest galleries and the biggest cheer of the day -- the Irish crowd erupting when Ulsterman Clarke chipped in from beyond the 16th green to give Europe a 3 and 2 victory.

Having beaten both the top American pairings on consecutive days, Clarke and Westwood have fully justified Woosnam's decision to select them as his two wildcard picks.