

Hayden's county debut today

LONDON, Apr 22: Australian opener Matthew Hayden makes his debut for Hampshire in their opening county championship match of the season against Essex at Chelmsford on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Hayden, 25, will take his place in Hampshire's side after being ignored by the Australian selectors for this summer's Test series against England.

Jason Laney returns to open the batting with Hayden, after playing for 'The Rest' against England A, while former England batsman Robin Smith is expected to recover from an ankle injury to take his place in the line-up.

Derbyshire opening batsman Kim Barnett is the country's biggest doubt for their championship curtain-raiser with Kent tomorrow.

Barnett is in the 13-man party for the game at Canterbury but will have a medical today on the back problem that forced him to miss the match against Cambridge University last week.

Ben Smith misses county champions Leicestershire's opening match of the season against Gloucestershire at Grace Road because of a broken finger.

Batsman Smith suffered the injury in the pre-season tour to South Africa and has been told it will take at least another week to heal sufficiently for him to start playing.

Team manager Jack Birkenshaw said: 'It's a big blow for Ben and us, because he was batting as well as anyone on our pre-season tour.'

Last season, Leicestershire had hardly any injury problems and used only 13 players throughout the summer. But, in addition to Smith, there will also be a late fitness check on off-spinner Adrian Pierson, who has a side strain.

Meanwhile, Leicestershire's overseas star Phil Simmons is still playing in the West Indies and won't be available until the end of May at the earliest. Leicestershire are searching for a possible replacement and hope to have a decision in the next 24 hours.

Graeme Hick launches his campaign for an England recall in a full-strength Worcestershire batting line-up against Nottinghamshire at Trent Bridge.

Coach David Houghton is backing Hick for a return to the international arena, after the Zimbabwe-born batsman failed to make the winter tour back to his home country and New Zealand.

Worcestershire, seventh in the championship last year, start the new season without spinner Richard Illingworth, who dislocated a shoulder in a Bradford league match last week.

His place will go to slow left-arm Matthew Rawnsley or all-rounder Gavin Haynes, returning after missing last season with a knee injury.

Ho Chi Minh City Open from Sunday

HANOI, Apr 22: The 1997 Ho Chi Minh City Open will start next Sunday, an official from the city's Tennis League said, reports AFP.

A total of 32 players from India, the Philippines, Thailand, Iran, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam have registered to take part.

The 25,000 dollar competition is due to last until May 3 and the winner will take home 4,000 dollars.

No internationally seeded players will take part.

TT gets its starlet

PRESTON, Apr 22: Golf has its Tiger Woods. Tennis has its Martina Hingis. Now table tennis has its own prodigy — 12-year-old Katy Parker, reports AP.

Parker will compete for England at the World Table Tennis Championships, which start Thursday in Manchester. At 12 years and 144 days, she will be the youngest English athlete to play in a world championship.

Parker, who stands only 4-foot-8, will play in the mixed doubles with partner Michael Chan. He's only 13.

Parker is the daughter of Jill Hammersley, a former European champion and three-time Commonwealth champion. Her father, Don, was an England international and manager of the England men's team in the 1980s.

Johnson at his best

DES MOINES (Iowa), Apr 22: World and Olympic 200- and 400-metre champion Michael Johnson has never been so fast so early in a year, making him hopeful of a stronger showing this weekend here at the Drake Relays, reports AFP.

Johnson won his 1997 outdoor debut Saturday in Waco, Texas, with a 400m victory in 43.75 seconds.

'I'm not surprised,' Johnson said. 'I'm in very good form for this point in the season, better than last year at the same time.'

Johnson's next goals are his personal best of 43.39 and the world record of 43.29 set in 1988 by Butch Reynolds.

Johnson plans to run the 200m for the first time this year here Saturday at the Drake Relays.

He also plans to run at next month's Prefontaine Classic as a tuneup to his 150m showdown race against Olympic 100m champion Donovan Bailey in six weeks at Toronto's Skydome.



Pakistan off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq in action during the first Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

First Test nicely poised

COLOMBO, Apr 22: Aravinda de Silva ended his Test run drought with a timely 79 not out to lead a fightback against Pakistan on the fourth day of the first Test today, reports AP.

De Silva, who has been batting superbly in limited-over internationals, resisted for 262



DE SILVA ... 79 n.o

Test half-century with a pull of Mushtaq for his sixth four. It took him 98 balls in 124 minutes, and he hit seven fours and one six altogether.

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SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of play on the fourth day of the first Test match between Pakistan and Sri Lanka on Tuesday:

SRI LANKA: First innings

330

PAKISTAN: First innings (370 for 9 overnight)

Elahi Ibw b Vaas 0

Raja c Ranatunga b Dharmasena 50

Ijaz c Dharmasena b Muralitharan 113

Malik run out 58

Inzamam c (sub) b Muralitharan 12

Mujtaba c and b Muralitharan 21

Moin b Muralitharan 0

Saqlain run out 58

Mushtaq b Muralitharan 26

Nazir c Ranatunga b Muralitharan 2

Zahid not out 6

Extras: (b-11, lb-7, nb-14) 32

Total: (all out) 378

Fall of wickets: 1-0; 2-102; 3-219; 4-247; 5-248; 6-248; 7-298; 8-336 and 9-349.

Bowling: O M R W

Vaas 32 6 75 1

Zoya 10 0 55 0

Dharmasena 52 5 19 93

Muralitharan 53 19 98 6

Jayasuriya 3 0 15 0

De Silva 4 0 16 0

Ranatunga 3 1 5 0

Arnold 2 1 3 0

SRI LANKA: Second innings

Atapattu c Nazir b Saqlain 25

Arnold c Nazir b Saqlain 15

De Silva not out 79

Ranatunga c Raja b Mushtaq 58

Tillekaratne not out 20

Extras: (b-4, nb-5) 9

Total: (for 3 wickets) 206

Fall of wickets: 1-38; 2-53; 3-182

Bowling: O M R W

Zahid 8 1 37 0

Nazir 6 0 33 0

Saqlain 28 7 52 2

Mushtaq 23 6 47 1

Mujtaba 15 3 33 0

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