

Jadeja was ideal: Imran

MUMBAI, Aug 3: Former Pakistan cricket captain Imran Khan says Ajay Jadeja would have been a better choice to lead the Indian team than batting maestro Sachin Tendulkar, reports PTI.

In a website (www.mid-day.com) chat from Karachi with Mumbai Daily Mid-Day, the cricketer-turned-politician touched upon various issues including Indo-Pak cricket and match-fixing.

"I have always found deposed Indian captain, Mohammad Azharuddin, a very likable person. Though I am very fond of Azhar, I have always felt it was more of a burden on him rather than a responsibility while watching him captain the side," he added on Sunday.

"I think it was the right decision to let him go. Whether Sachin is the right choice or not remains to be seen. However, I feel Jadeja was someone who loved the responsibility and I think it might have been worth giving him a chance and keeping the responsibility away from Sachin," Imran Khan said.

"Sachin is a highly intelligent cricketer apart from being the world's top batsman. Now it is up to him to handle the team and there is no reason why he cannot," Imran Khan added.

On Indo-Pak cricketing ties, Imran Khan said, "cricket can only promote peace between the two countries when there is no hostility to begin with. When the hostilities are as high as they are right now, then instead of actually promoting ties it is going to cause more hatred."

"Obviously we cannot wait for the cricketing ties to resume before the Kashmir issue is resolved, because that is the root cause of problems between the two countries. The hatred between the two countries was mutual and hence it is not the right time to start any cricket series. There should be a cooling off period and only then they may resume playing," he added.

"I also feel that cricket will start promoting good relations between the two countries once the root cause is solved," Imran said.

Asked for his views on his protégé Wasim Akram's alleged involvement in the match-fixing episode, Imran Khan said "I don't know which of the individuals have indulged in it and I have no reasons or proof to believe that Akram would indulge in any match-fixing."

"I certainly know neither Akram nor any of the players were involved in any match-fixing during the recent World Cup but I think four or five years back the team was involved in match-fixing especially after a few Australian players accused some Pakistani cricketers of involvement," he added.

Warne as fit as a fiddle

ADELAIDE, Australia, Aug 3 (AFP): Shane Warne says he's fighting fit and raring to go on Australia's cricket tour of Sri Lanka this month after a respite from cricket at home with his family.

The Australian leg-spinner, who underwent a reconstruction of his right bowling arm in April last year, said tests Monday revealed his shoulder was fine with just a couple of small areas he needed to continue strengthening.

"Basically, I've got a brand new shoulder that hasn't had many miles in it so... it's quite exciting what the future holds and I think the way I'm bowling again, hopefully I can play both forms of the game," Warne told a local radio station here.

Dropped from the last Test against the West Indies in April, Warne said he was looking forward to the tour of Sri Lanka, starting later this month, and was not concerned about local security despite last week's suicide bombing in Colombo.

"As I've always said, I enjoy going to Sri Lanka. A lot of people have put it out of perspective," Warne said.

"My only problem, I suppose, in the past has been with (former Sri Lankan captain) Arjuna Ranatunga and I think the feeling's mutual, he doesn't like me and I don't particularly like him."

"But I've got no problem with the Sri Lankan players. I've got no problem with the Sri Lankan public. They've been fantastic the couple of times I've been there and I'm looking forward to it."

Asked if he thought he and Ranatunga would overcome their differences, Warne said: "I think we probably will over time. I mean, he's said a lot of stuff and I've said probably too much as well."

"But look, there's lots of different things why he doesn't like me and vice versa but I'm looking forward to the tour of Sri Lanka because I think it's a good place and I've enjoyed the times there."

Sugiyama shocks Pierce

CARLSBAD, California, Aug 3: Unseeded Ai Sugiyama, who lost earlier in the day in the qualifying tournament, pulled a stunning turnaround in the evening with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-1 first-round win over fifth-seeded Mary Pierce Monday night at the \$200,000 TIG Classic, reports AP.

Sugiyama failed to gain one of the four qualifying spots when she lost to Mellen Tu, 3-6, 7-5, 6-1. However, she got a reprieve when Magdalena Maleeva, Pierce's opponent, withdrew because of a recurring problem with a stress fracture in her left arm.



Some Malaysian students admire the Cyber Alang (Cyber Bird), the mascot for the 2006 Asian Games which was formally unveiled in a ceremony in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. —AFP photo

World C'ships commence

EINDHOVEN, Netherlands, Aug 3: Table tennis stars spent the first day of the 45th World Championships waiting in the wings here on Monday as the event finally got underway, reports AFP.

The Championships, postponed because of the Kosovo conflict, have attracted virtually every top name in the game despite the political, logistical and calendar problems.

The women's event proper begins on Tuesday, with the men joining in on Wednesday. Monday was dedicated to lesser players trying to qualify for the tournament.

The enforced absence of the Yugoslav team was the only blemish.

The Dutch government refused to grant visas to the Yugoslav delegation and, despite a plea from table tennis chiefs, they refused to make an exception.

tion to a policy in force since the beginning of the Kosovo crisis.

One Yugoslav -- Slobodan Grujic -- will take part in the men's singles, as he plays in the European Union and has a visa that allows him to travel freely. Eindhoven only offered to stage the event three months ago after Belgrade, the original venue, had to be abandoned because of the NATO offensive in Yugoslavia.

The International Table Tennis Federation, the world governing body, has gambled, however, on going ahead despite the lack of preparation.

Monday's successful qualifiers will find themselves pitted against seeds in the first round.

Table tennis politics also took precedence on day one.

It was confirmed that the players' union -- the Club of Table Tennis Professionals -- was being wound-up due to lack of interest.

The interest of the professional players in their own or-

ganisation has fallen to zero," it announced.

This could have an impact on the club scene, as the Club frequently intervened in transfers between clubs.

Meetings to help shape the future of one of the world's biggest participation sports were also scheduled for the coming week.

In a sport that has seen no significant rule change since 1937, there is finally a wind of change blowing through the corridors of power with lucrative television deals -- especially in the sport's Asian strongholds -- up for grabs.

A proposal to dispense with the 38mm ball in favour of the new 40mm model looks set to be adopted by the Executive Committee.

Lonely pimple was banned early this year and the use of gloves will also come under scrutiny as the game's controllers decide on the best way forward for the sport.

Randell's sordid saga

HOBART, Australia, Aug 3 (AFP): A woman who claims Australian international cricket umpire Steve Randell indecently assaulted her admitted in court Tuesday that she later sent him a postcard.

However the woman, who was 11 at the time, denied she had fantasised about him.

She was the second of two women to tell the Tasmanian Supreme Court that he had fondled her and placed her hand on his penis in 1982.

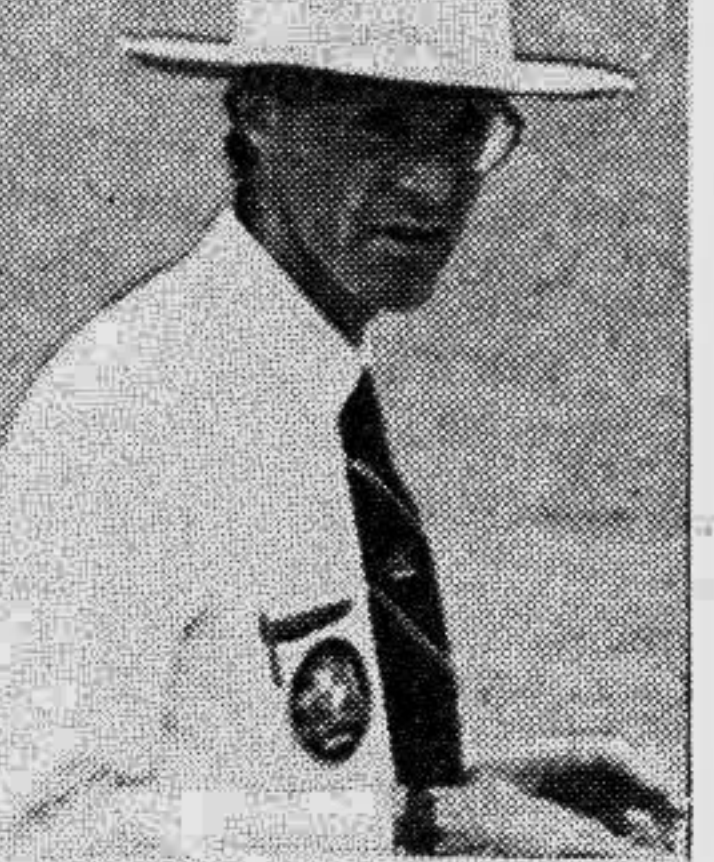
Randell, 43, has pleaded not guilty to 18 charges of indecent assault involving 10 young girls while he was teaching at a school in Burnie, Tasmania, in 1981 and 1982.

The woman said that early in 1982 Randell was "very helpful and consoling" when she discussed family problems with him.

Around the middle of the year he came into the bedroom of a friend's home where she was staying and sat on the bed. She said he put his hand under the covers and nightdress and stroked her chest and stomach.

Later in the year, Randell came to her own home and again stroked her chest and pubic area, kissing her with his tongue, the court heard.

He also put her hand on his penis.



STEVE RANDELL

Cross-examined by Randell's counsel, Peter Barker, the woman said she thought the first incident was "strange and slightly inappropriate rather than wrong". After the second,

she was "in a state of confusion as to whether what happened was appropriate or not".

She told Barker she had not written to Randell from Queensland state where she had gone for a holiday, but after being shown a postcard, the contents of which were not divulged, she agreed she had sent one.

Asked if she had also sent him a Christmas card conveying her love and affection, she replied: "Possibly, I don't remember doing it."

The other woman claimed she was first assaulted at a friend's home, telling the court she was one of four girls aged nine to 11 sitting on a bed with a blanket pulled up to their waists, watching television.

Randell came in, sat between her and another girl and rearranged the blanket over them.

The woman was close to tears as she said Randell put her hand under her bra and touched her breast. He then took her left hand and forced it through his underpants onto his erect penis.

World chess roundup

LAS VEGAS, Aug 3: All but one of the 64 spots in the second round of the World Chess Championship have been determined after playoff matches. Two of the matches were decided by sudden death games, reports AP.

In the sudden death games Monday, white had four minutes and black had five minutes to complete the game. Each player received an additional 10 seconds of thinking time each time the player made a move.

This seven-round elimination tournament which began with 100 contestants, will run throughout August at Caesars Palace hotel-casino. Prizes totaling 3 million dollars will be awarded, and a new champion will be crowned at the event's conclusion.

Spectators were on the edge of their seats, and in many cases standing on them, as Peter Nielsen of Denmark, playing the white pieces, upset former US champion Joel Benjamin in the first game of their sudden death match. Nielsen was seeded 84th and Benjamin 48th.

Sergei Tiurkovich of the Netherlands won a piece and forced the resignation of local favourite Dmitry Gurevich of the United States in the second game of their sudden death match. Gurevich, who has won many important tournaments in Las Vegas, was unable to convert an advantage in the first game.

Americans fared better earlier in the day.

Matches, in which each player had 25 minutes plus 10 seconds per move per game, Tal Shaked and Alex Yermolinsky advanced.

Shaked, the former world junior champion, missed a win in the first game of this set, but pressed home a strong attack on the Queenside to win the second game over Vlastimil Babula of the Czech Republic. Shaked, seeded 91st, became the lowest-ranked player to advance.

Spraggett defeated Kevin Spraggett of Canada in their first game of the day. Spraggett was eliminated when the second game ended in a draw.

Sergei Dolmatov of Russia, Lev Psakis of Israel, Anthony Miles of England and Karen Asrian of Armenia all followed Yermolinsky's example by winning their first game and drawing their second to qualify for Tuesday's second round.

Asrian was quite fortunate to even be involved in the playoffs. He had lost his first game of Round 1 to Andres Rodriguez of Uruguay on Saturday. Rodriguez, who needed only a draw in Sunday's second game, spurned an opportunity to force the tie, and played for a win. Rodriguez' strategy backfired when his attack failed and he lost, forcing Monday's playoff.

Asrian made no such mistake. Miles also had been lucky to reach the playoffs. The Englishman, in a must-win situation, had somehow gained a victory out of a position that most grandmasters deemed completely even against Ralf Akesson of Sweden on Sunday.

Dibyendu Barua of India,

Hannes Stefansson of Iceland, Aleksei Dreev of Russia and Nielsen all managed to come through with victories in the second game of this set while facing elimination after either a loss or a draw.

Dreev staged his comeback against Robert Zelcic of Croatia, while Stefansson evened things up with Alexander Zubarov and Nielsen tied his match against Benjamin.

Barua was a huge underdog after losing the set's first game against the higher seeded Alexander Khalifman of Russia. Barua's fate seemed sealed when the Russian attained a solid, even position in the second game.

Khalifman decided to win a pawn however, and Barua used the opportunity to harass his opponent's Queen and conjure up a decisive attack.

Tiviakov and Gurevich moved to the next set of matches by drawing both of their games.

The second playoff set allowed only 15 minutes plus 10 seconds per move to each player per game.

Stefansson and Dreev each won their first game and held on for a draw in the second to secure their places in the next round.

Khalifman managed a draw in his first game against Barua after the Indian player seemed to have the better position early in the game.

In the second game it was Khalifman who held the early advantage. But Barua managed to build a seemingly impenetrable fortress.

Malaysia enters bid for 2006 Asian Games

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 3: Malaysia today officially launched its campaign to host the 2006 Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur, reports AFP.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi started the 8.2 million ringgit (2.2 million dollar) campaign insisting: "Our offer is based on the experience, infrastructure and our collective will to ensure the Games success."

Malaysia hopes to capitalise on its experience in hosting the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur last September. But it is expected to face tough competition for the 2006 Games from Hong Kong, New Delhi, Hong Doha in Qatar and the Uzbekistan capital, Tashkent.

The Olympic Council of Asia is expected to make a decision next year.

"Give us the opportunity and we promise we will try our best to make this one of the most memorable games in its history," Abdullah said.

"The resounding success of the Commonwealth Games in 1998 was a watershed in Malaysian sporting history. It showed to the world that Malaysia was capable of organising such a major event," he said.

"It was this success that gave us the added confidence of not only first attempting to host the Asian Games, but eventually the 2008 Olympics as well."

Careless Havana

HAVANA, Aug 3: Cuban baseball fans seemed to care little that some of their athletes, even a baseball player, defected during the Pan American Games, reports AP.

Crowded around televisions in living rooms to watch Cuba beat the United States 5-1 Monday night for the gold medal in baseball, the only important thing was who stayed -- and played.

Orestes Kindelan, home run! Teresa Menendez shouted at the small colour television set in her modest living room as the slugger hit one of two during the game. "That's the way to do it, Go, Cuba!"

Menendez and her family shivered at the sight of 19-year-old pitcher Danyel Baez left the team on Sunday, some said they were not convinced it was true.

"The ballplayers never stay behind," said Menendez as she sat on the linoleum floor of the front room, scrunched between relatives and neighbours while a skeletal fan built from scrap metal and a washing machine motor hummed nearby.

"Even if it is true, we would have no way of knowing," added her 34-year-old son, Alejandro Duarte, an unemployed tourism worker who watched the win from a carved wooden rocking chair in his Adidas swim trunks. "These things never come out on television or in the press here."

Because all national media is controlled by the communist government, Cubans generally learn of such things through calls from relatives in the United States, unconfirmed rumors passed among co-workers and neighbours, or reports on the US government's Radio Marti.

It wasn't until a few days ago that the Menendez-Duarte family heard about the defection of a group of Cuban basketball players in Puerto Rico last month. "Oh, I thought that was in Winnipeg," commented a young neighbour.

Chang, Courier advance

MONTREAL, Aug 3: Unseeded Americans Michael Chang and Jim Courier won first-round matches here on Monday to open the 2.45 million-dollar ATP du Maurier Open, reports AP.

Chang, who won the title here in 1990, struggled early but recovered to oust Slovakia's Jan Krosnak 5-7, 7-5, 6-1.

"The good thing is I was fighting well today," Chang said. "The match was pretty close and I had some opportunities in the first set to get up early on a break. And, you know I wasn't able to convert those points."

"It looked like (Krosnak) started to get a bit tight and I was able to hit some shots and, you know, the whole match completely turned around."

Courier outlasted German Rainer Schuttler 7-6, 6-2.

"It is a step in the right direction," Courier said. "Today is the first day I have gotten every close call in net court in my favour in a whole year. I think someone was saying, 'Okay, we are just going to let you have them all back today and now we are all back to even.' You know how they say it all evens out, that is a bunch of baloney. I would have rather had them in crucial moments in the Grand Slams or Davis Cup."

Two other US players were less fortunate. Chris Woodruff was ousted by South African qualifier Kevin Ullyett 6-1, 4-6, 6-3, and Justin Gimelstob fell victim to Canada's Sebastien Lareau, 7-6, 6-1.

Australia's Patrick Rafter is the top seed and defending champion at the event after a stunning run last summer where he won four hardcourt titles, including his second consecutive US Open title.

Rafter last week became the 17th player to own the ATP top ranking but his reign lasted only a week with Pete Sampras taking over.

This year Rafter has won only one title but is 30-13 after reaching the final of the Italian Open and the semifinals at Wimbledon. He also has guided Australia to the ATP Tour World Team Championship and the semifinals of the Davis Cup.



Canada's Joanne Malar powers through the pool during the Pan Am Games women's 400metre medley final on August 2. She set a new Games mark to win. —AFP photo

Cubans keep on defecting USA way above them all

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Aug 3: Canada tried to get the focus back on the competitive side of the Pan American Games, but more defections and complaints from the Cubans and a doping scandal continued to cloud the 13th regional Olympics, reports AP.

With three gold medals in swimming, the host country tried move beyond several distractions, especially the revocation of Canada's gold medal in roller hockey due to the positive doping test of goaltender Steve Vezina.

However, Cuba's defection fired a broadside shot at organizers, saying security was lacking and that it would respond quickly to any insult.

"Cuban athletes will not permit anyone or anything to humiliate them ... if their dignity is at stake," a statement from the Cuban delegation said. "From now on we will react with full energy to provocations."

The release from the Cubans was specifically aimed at the protester who jumped out of the stands with a sign "Human Rights First" during their baseball semifinal game Sunday against Canada.

But it also followed reports of more defections from their delegation.

Nineteen-year-old pitcher Danyel Baez was the latest to leave the Cuban team, supposedly heading to Miami with pro baseball agent Joe Cubas, who has helped many Cuban ballplayers to defect.

Winnipeg City Police said federal officials had detained the protester from Sunday night's game, who gave a Miami address, for possible immigration violations. He was taken into custody after getting into a scuffle with four members of the Cuban delegation, who came upon the protester outside the Canadian Broadcast Corporation offices late Sunday.

However, Cuba's anger was eased somewhat by its 5-1 victory over the United States Monday night for its eighth straight baseball gold. Cuba takes the Pan Ams very seriously and baseball is its most beloved sport.

The victory came after it had been beaten twice in the preliminary round, 10-5 by the Americans and 8-1 by Canada, forcing

them into a tough quarterfinal with the Dominican Republic. Orestes Kindelan hit a pair of homers, Gabriel Pierre had another and pitcher Jose Contreras pitched a four-hitter over eight innings with 13 strikeouts.

Cuba also got a lift from its men's volleyball team, which outlasted Brazil 25-22, 14-25.

Pan Am mascot attacked!

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Aug 3: Pato, the Pan American Games mascot, was rushed to hospital after being knocked to the ground by an intoxicated passer-by on Sunday, reports Reuters.

"He hit me smack in the back of the head and I went down," said Brenda Reinhardt, the volunteer wearing the colourful duck costume at the time.

"I was sort of out of it but I could hear someone say, 'Get help!'"

Reinhardt was the original Pato (the Spanish word for duck), first donning the mascot suit in November 1996, and has since devoted thousands of hours to the role.

She was mingling with the crowd leaving the baseball park, where Cuba had just defeated Canada in the Pan Am semifinal, when the attack occurred.

"I stayed down for quite a while because my head was just spinning," said Reinhardt, who, true to the mascot code, did not remove the huge duck's head until she was in a van and on the way to hospital.

"At the hospital they were moving me around in full costume, except for the head, in a wheelchair," she said.

Reinhardt, a fitness instructor in real life and the mother of two teenagers, underwent two series of X-rays before being diagnosed with severe neck muscle and ligament strain and released.

"I've been bopped before but more in a playful way, never anything like this. This was outright violent," Reinhardt said Monday from her Winnipeg home.

Despite the incident, Reinhardt vowed to be back in costume before the Games end Sunday.



United States' Alexandra Stevenson is jubilant after recording victory over Canadian Renata Kolbovic at the Pan Am Games on August 2. She won 7-6, 4-6, 7-6. —AFP photo

17-25, 25-23, 15-12 for the gold. For Canada, despite its 9-2 victory over Mexico earlier in the day for the baseball bronze, much of the host country's attention was still drawn to the doping scandal that wouldn't completely die.

At a news conference in Saint-Adele, Quebec, Vezina apologised for costing his country the gold, but didn't sound very apologetic.

"In a professional athlete and you're allowed to take these substances," Vezina said. "A cheater? I don't know."

"I take a little bit to help me get ready for ice hockey and it seems it would be less bad if I robbed a bank. There would be less media. It's weird how people react sometimes."

Elsewhere, the United States won three of the five early gold medals awarded Monday, taking both the men's and women's mountain bike titles and the team three-day equestrian crown.

That took the United States' total to 73 and 179 of all colours. Cuba was second with 33 gold and Canada was second in the overall count with 104.

Elsewhere, Wimbledon semifinalist Alexandra Stevenson of the United States got her first test at the Pan Ams, needing a third-set tiebreaker to edge Renata Kolbovic of Canada 7-6, 4-6, 7-6. The victory sent Stevenson to the women's tennis semifinals.

Almost lost in all the distractions were the Games themselves.

Joanne Malar led Canada's gold haul in swimming, capturing the 400-metre individual medley in a Games record 4 minutes, 36.48 second and nearly half of a pool length in front of her closest rival.

Malar actually had two Games records on Monday, returning to help the 800-metre free relay team to a time of 8:05.56, while Canadian compatriot Laura Nicholls won the 100 free in 56.25.

A third Pan Ams record was set in the pool when Ed Moses broke the 100-metre breaststroke for the second time in less than 12 hours.

Moses gold was the last of four on the day for the United States, which increased its leading total to 74. Cuba swept all four judo titles and with its baseball and volleyball crowns remained in second with 39.

And Gustavo Borges won his fourth gold in his Pan Ams career, capturing the men's 200 freestyle for the second consecutive time.

Bermuda's Mary Jane Tumbridge finally ended the American streak, taking the individual three-day equestrian event on Bermuda's Gold, giving her Caribbean nation its first gold at the Games.

In team play, the United States easily advanced to the women's soccer final, beating Costa Rica 2-0 in a game that was nowhere near as close as the score indicated. The Americans will take on Mexico, which in the other semifinal, rallied from a two-goal deficit to tie Canada 2-2 and advance 5-3 on penalties.

AOC awarded the rights

SYDNEY, Aug 3: Australia's Olympic Committee was awarded ownership rights of film footage of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics on Tuesday after a court battle against an American company, reports AP.

The AOC sought a court declaration that it owned the copyright of footage made by the late documentary film producer Peter Whitchurch, who led the 1956 Games film unit employed by the organising committee. US sports film company, The Big Fights Inc, claimed it had entered into agreements with Whitchurch's daughters, who, it said, effectively sold it the copyright of three films.

Justice Kevin Lindgren, whose summary was broadcast live on the Internet, found in favour of the AOC in relation to the copyright and in relation to a dispute over the present ownership of copies of the films. The copies were being held in safe storage pending his decision.

The matter was put over to Aug 11 for directions or orders, as may be appropriate.