

Capriati to head HK Challenge

AFP, Hong Kong

American tennis ace Jennifer Capriati will head a select cast of international stars vying for the Hong Kong Ladies Challenge at Victoria Park this week.

The players will also be looking to hone their skills ahead of the first Grand Slam event of the year, the Australian Open.

The knock-out tournament in Hong Kong which runs from January 2 to 5 also features French star Mary Pierce, Russians Elena Dementieva -- the world number 15 -- and Lina Krasnoroutskaya, South African Amanda Coetzler and Austrian Barbara Schett.

Asia will be represented by Thailand's number one Tamarine Tanasugarn and rising Indonesian star Angelique Widjaja -- the 2001 junior Wimbledon champion -- who will have the daunting task of facing Capriati in the opening round.

Capriati, 25, is back for the third year in a row, having won the Hong Kong exhibition in 2000, defeating Swiss Miss Martina Hingis in the final. That win signalled the beginning of the second coming of Capriati, who first hit the headlines as a 14-year-old.

However injuries and a case of burnout saw her fall from grace, but she bounced back in spectacular fashion last year to claim the French and Australian Open titles.

The world number two also sat briefly on top of the world rankings before being pipped in the last event of the season by Lindsay Davenport.

Co-tournament director Terry Catton said: "We desperately wanted Jennifer to return, and we feel that Hong Kong is something of a lucky omen for her as this is where she played in 2000 before she began her resurgence.

"Martina Hingis had originally confirmed she would play, but after having surgery on an ankle injury, decided it was best to miss it this year."

The tournament will offer no prize money as it is "termed a special event and only offers the players appearance money -- money to participate," he said adding the "total budget was about 600,000 dollars US" a significant proportion of which would go to Capriati.

Two-time grand slam winner Mary Pierce will also make her first appearance of the season here after a frustrating injury blighted the 2001 season that contributed to the French beauty's slump to a lowly world ranking of 129 last season.

Eyes on Scud for the future

AFP, Adelaide

Davis Cup captain John Fitzgerald will be following Mark Philippoussis in this week's Australian Hardcourt tennis championship, hoping he can boost Australia's tennis fortunes.

For Philippoussis, a wild-card entry into the Adelaide tournament starting Monday may end a frustrating year blighted by a knee injury.

And for Fitzgerald, a fit Philippoussis could mean a replacement for dual US Open champion Pat Rafter, who has taken a sabbatical from the game, for the Davis Cup first-round tie in Argentina next February.

"We are hoping he is physically okay; he has given every indication he will be available if he is fit and so far he looks terrific," Fitzgerald said Sunday.

Andrew Ilie is also being considered by Fitzgerald for the Davis Cup team.

The Adelaide tournament has a first-round highlight on Monday between Americans Pete Sampras and Todd Martin.

The tournament's No.1 seed, Briton Tim Henman, has high hopes for this year's tournament after making it to the semifinals last year.

Glenn finds SA boring

Cricket

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australia fast bowler Glenn McGrath has branded South Africa's tactics as negative after they crashed to defeat in the first two matches of their three-Test series.

"From the start of this series, I've said the South Africans are under more pressure because the series has been built up so much," McGrath said in a column in The Sunday Herald Sun newspaper in Melbourne.

"It was up to them to raise their game and be competitive against us, but so far they've been unable to do that and we've completely dominated them.

"The way they bat and bowl is very negative and I don't know how they expect to beat us while they are playing like that.

Australia, confirming their status

as the world's top side, won the second Test at Melbourne Cricket Ground by nine wickets on Saturday after also dominating the first. South Africa came into the series as



GLENN MCGRATH Australia's closest rivals but McGrath, who has taken 68 wickets from 14 Tests this year, said he

had shown they could not handle pressure.

The bowler said some of Australia's batsmen had noticed how quiet the South Africans fielders became once a big partnership started to build.

"So I'll say it again...I still don't believe the South Africans think they can beat us."

Matthew Hayden, meanwhile, the highest run-scorer in test cricket this year, said Australia were keen on improving still further.

Hayden, who scored his fifth century of the year in the second Test in his total of 1,388 runs from 14 Tests for the calendar year, said: "We're still wanting to train, we're still wanting to become better players and be the best at what we do."

He told Australian television on Sunday: "We're very proud of our title of being number one and we want to maintain our strength in world cricket."

Spin trap awaits Proteas

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australia may throw the terror-spin twins Shane Warne and Stuart MacGill at the demoralised South Africans in Wednesday's final cricket Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Leg-spinner MacGill was Sunday added to the Australian squad, which has been boosted to 13.

Australia are chasing a 3-0 whitewash having secured the series with a nine-wicket win at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Saturday.

"We've got the momentum going our way and we've got a good record in Sydney," Waugh said Sunday.

"I don't know what the wicket's going to be like but I'd like to think there'll be a bit of turn.

"We're playing good cricket. I'd like to win it three-nil."

The omens are there for two wrist-spinners to play in Sydney. So far Warne has taken 11 wickets in the series and MacGill claimed nine for Capriati.

New South Wales in the tour match against the Proteas here last week.

MacGill is sure the SCG pitch will take spin and that he can operate in tandem with Warne.

"The pitch I took nine wickets on



STUART MACGILL against the South Africans at the SCG had no grass on it at all, but one

thing I have found over the years is that it always turns at the SCG whether there is grass on the surface or not," MacGill said Sunday.

He thought his attacking style could complement the pressure exerted by Warne and Glenn McGrath.

"The last time I bowled with Shane in a Test at the SCG (against England in 1998-99) a feature of that seemed to be that they were really concentrating on keeping him out," he said.

"If there's someone at the other end who has an aura about them, like Shane or Glenn McGrath, then you find it makes your job a whole lot easier.

"As Shane has enjoyed some success in this series already I'm hoping that will be the case again if I'm selected."

AUSTRALIA (from): Steve Waugh (capt), Matthew Hayden, Justin Langer, Ricky Ponting, Mark Waugh, Damien Martyn, Adam Gilchrist, Shane Warne, Brett Lee, Andy Bichel, Glenn McGrath, Brad Williams, Stuart MacGill.

Anna hogs the limelight in NZ

Tennis

AFP, Auckland

Russian pinup Anna Kournikova has never won a title and has a ranking of 74, but she's hot property for New Zealand's tennis-hungry fans.

The most talked-about and photographed woman in tennis is in town to kick-start her career in the 140,000 dollars WTA Classic tournament starting here Monday.

She has drawn Zimbabwe's Cara Black in the first round.

If Kournikova beats the world No 58, her likely second round opponent is American Amy Frazier, the tournament's seventh seed.

The Russian could not recall losing to Black, but still expected her first match after a long layoff due to injury to be tough.

"She's a tough player, always fighting, and runs for every ball. It's going to be a tough match. The first game of the year is always hard," said the 20-year-old.

Kournikova has had a low-key build up to her comeback tournament.

She has seen her world ranking slip to 74 from eight after missing several tournaments last year due to a foot injury. She has been in New Zealand for several days preparing for her opening round match on Tuesday.

"Everything is going well," she said at a press conference. "I've been practising ... and I'm having a good time."

The Auckland tournament is Kournikova's first visit to New Zealand and she said she was enjoying the relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

"I've been working hard, doing lots of rehab, so I could get back as soon as possible. Hopefully I can come back and reach the point where I was when my injury happened. That's my goal right now."

Aside from Kournikova, the tournament also features former world number two Conchita Martinez of Spain, also on her way back after injury.

Defending champion Meilen Tu of the United States, who will meet Tunisia's Selima Star first up, said she was glad to be back in Auckland but her focus was January's Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the season.

"This field is so strong," said Tu, who ended the season ranked 35. "Last year I came in unseeded and won the tournament and it could happen again."

Other players to watch for are Tatiana Poutchek from Belarus, former Auckland doubles winner Janette Husarova, and Martina Sucha who qualified for the tournament in Bratislava and won through to the final.

"It's good to have a lot of new faces coming to Auckland. It's a very even field with a lot of players who have improved their ranking dramatically in the past 12 months," said tournament director Richard Palmer.

Yevgeny to play in Qatar Open

AFP, Doha

Yevgeny Kafelnikov is aiming to extend his impressive form of 2001 into the new year as he bids to clinch his first title at the Qatar Open which begins here on Monday.

The Russian world number four won five titles last year - two singles and three doubles - but feels he needs to put the record straight in Doha where he has never made it past the quarter-final stage.

Nat'l women chess Selection phase now from Jan 9

SPORTS REPORTER

The selection phase of the 23rd National Women Chess Championship will start from January 9 at 3:00 pm instead of January 3 at Bangladesh Chess Federation Auditorium.

Interested women and girls have been asked to enrol their names on or before January 7 at the federation office. The tournament will be held on Swiss League format and 6 players will be selected for the final phase. Federation will provide food and accommodation to the district players.

Rajshahi cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Raninagar Cricket Training Centre (B) and Padma Garden Cricket School recorded their victories in the seventh Bir Shrestha Shaheed Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir Smriti Gold Cup cricket tournament at the local Railway playground yesterday.

In the first match of the day, Raninagar defeated Bangladesh Railway Sporting Club by 109 runs.

Winning the toss, Raninagar batted first and collected 195 runs for two in the stipulated 25 overs.

In reply, Bangladesh Railway went all out in 19.3 overs making 86 runs.

In the second match of the day played at the same venue, Padma Garden beat Al-Rashid Cricket Academy (A) by 20 runs.

Padma Garden won the toss and decided to bat first. They made 170 runs in 23.4 overs.

In reply, Al-Rashid collected 150 runs losing nine wickets in the stipulated 25 overs.

B'baria cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Titas Cricket Club and Agraduth Sporting Club won their respective matches of the Shaheed Freedom Fighter Ranga Mia Smriti Gold Cup cricket tournament at the Shahjadpur Junior High School playground yesterday.

In the first match of the day, Titas defeated Progoti Cricket Club by 30 runs.

Winning the toss, Titas decided to bat first and collected 135 runs for six wickets in the stipulated 30 overs.

In reply, Progoti were all out for 105 in 25 overs.

Agraduth beat Malays Cricket Club by 20 runs in the other match of the day.

Winning the toss, Agraduth batted first and collected 145 runs in the stipulated 30 overs losing seven wickets.

In reply, Malays made 125 losing all the wickets in 20 overs.

Open chess

BSS, Dhaka

An open Chess tournament will be held for women at the Sultana Kamal Mohila Krira Complex from January 6 to 8.

Bangladesh Women Sports Federation (BWSF) will organise the tournament with the sponsorship of Hasan Imama Ali Imama trust, a BWSF press release said yesterday.

Intending participants have been requested to report at the Sultana Kamal Mohila Krira Complex from December 31 to January 5.

Premier kabadi

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Police defeated Sonali Bank 75-43 with five Ions and secured two points in the Premier Kabadi League yesterday.

The winners dominated the first half 42-17.

Bangladesh Rifles meet Dilkusha Sporting today.

Hewitt inspires Australia

Tennis

AFP, Perth

Australia's newly crowned world No.1 Lleyton Hewitt beat Roger Federer in a topsy-turvy men's singles as the second-seeded home country toppled reigning champions Switzerland in the Hopman Cup tennis mixed teams competition here Sunday.

Hewitt, in front of a record crowd for the tournament of 8,486 at

Burswood Dome, won a three-set thriller 6-3, 0-6, 6-4 in 97 minutes to defeat the 13th-ranked Federer.

Hewitt got home after his partner, Alicia Molik, scored a straight sets win over Miroslava Vavrinec in a women's singles encounter of the million-dollar (500,000 US dollar) contest.

Molik, 20, ranked 47th in the world, beat the 23-year-old Vavrinec (116th) 6-3, 6-4 in 72 minutes.

This gave Australia an unbeatable 2-0 lead even before the start of the mixed doubles.

In the doubles, Hewitt and Molik -

who grew up together by the beach in Adelaide, South Australia -- completed a 3-0 clean sweep for Australia by overcoming the Swiss pair 6-3, 6-1.

Hewitt romped to victory in his opening set of the men's singles, breaking Federer's service in the sixth game.

But Federer staged a remarkable recovery in the second set, breaking his star opponent in the second, fourth and sixth games as Hewitt lost his touch.

In the deciding third set, Hewitt had to fight all the way against a stubborn opponent.

"It was very tough," Hewitt conceded. "Roger is that kind of player - very flashy and does not give you a lot of opportunities to get your rhythm."

"I felt that in the games and sets that I did win, I played pretty good tennis."

"Roger hit some incredible shots. Then he shanks a few balls and you get your opportunity. You have to take them. It is like weathering a storm out there."

"Every time I have played him it has been the same sort of situation. He plays some great tennis, then he steps off the pedal."

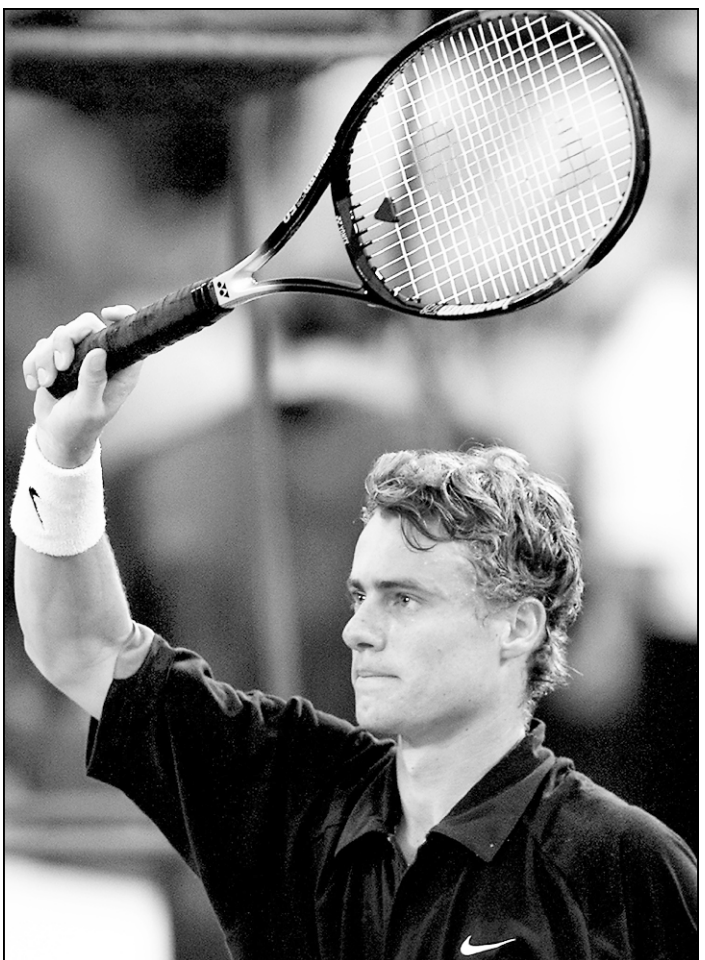
"He was on a roll (at the end of the second set) and to break his serve and get on top at the start of the third set definitely helped my confidence."

"Only a few weeks after we lost the final of the Davis Cup (to France), it is great to get Australia off to a good start here," he said.

"I was a bit down after we were beaten in the Davis Cup, but I had tried to think of all the positives that had emerged for me during the year, including getting the top ranking."

Federer said: "I had a better preparation (than Hewitt) after having three weeks' practice, and I thought I might have gone in as favourite, but he has too much confidence after winning the Tennis Masters' Cup (in Sydney in November) and going to No.1."

Molik said: "I tried to relax as much as I could, because there was a bit of pressure in front of a home crowd, but they were behind me."



World No 1 Lleyton Hewitt of Australia waves to the crowd after defeating Roger Federer of Switzerland at the Hopman Cup in Perth on December 30.

Pierce fights to be fit

Tennis

AFP, Hong Kong

Mary Pierce is fighting fit and roaring to go after a disastrous 2001 season blighted by injury.

Languishing at a lowly 130 in the rankings, the burly Frenchwoman is quietly confident she can rediscover the form that brought her two Grand Slam titles, but she isn't getting her hopes up too high.

"I've had a lot of rest and a lot of doing nothing and that's been really good for me," she said here, where she is making her comeback in the Ladies Challenge exhibition starting Wednesday.

After trouble with tendonitis in both ankles and a bout of the flu, Pierce was forced out of the French

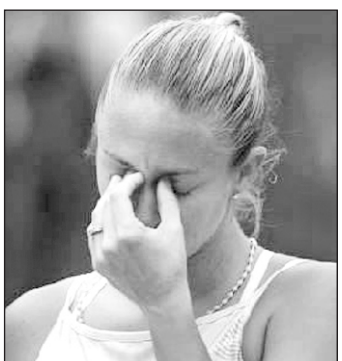
Open, Wimbledon and the US Open last year with chronic back problems, ending her season before it started.

"My back just needed to heal," said the 26-year-old. "I started doing exercises to stabilise my back and my stomach muscles and after that some light hitting."

"Day by day it's been getting better and I really feel 100 percent now. In fact, I'm probably as fit and healthy as I've ever been."

Her focus is on the Grand Slams and Melbourne in January for the Australian Open, the first major of the year.

She has been granted a wild card to one of her favourite tournaments but won't be drawn on her chances.



MARY PIERCE

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid and clues. Clues include: 1 False hood?, 4 Selassie worship-ppr, 9 Taxi, 12 Raw rock, 13 Tools for duels, 14 Candle count, 15 Colorado town, 17 Wish undone, 18 Cancer neighbor, 19 More derogatory, 21 Convent cloistful, 24 Billions of years, 25 Pub offering, 26 Ply a needle, 28 California-Nevada resort area, 31 Status, 33 Brylcreem dose, 35 Siestas, 36 Rio Grande feeder.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with numbers 1-53 and letters A-Z.

CRYPTOQUIP G J Y G O M F Y D Y B O Y X N J Y N I M X K S P Q D U N D Y F Q U O P B B P Y F N J Q N U Q K P D P G Q B X Y I P B B Z M B B Q Z G M S Saturday's Cryptogram: IF YOU PENNED A CAR'S LIFE STORY, I GUESS THAT COULD BE CALLED AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. Today's Cryptogram Clue: B equals L The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.