

Capriati prepares to spoil party

Tennis

REUTERS, Berlin

Little suggests Jennifer Capriati should be listed among the favourites for next week's French Open but the resilient American has a record for fighting against the odds.

While the Williams sisters, Serena and Venus, and the Belgian pair of Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin-Hardenne have kept up a constant pace, the former world number one has struggled this year.

The defence of her Australian Open title in January ended with her first match and she took time off later that month to have eye surgery to remove sunspots.

But when the clay-court season came around the American proved she could still do damage, reaching the semifinals of the German Open -- her first tournament of the year on the slow surface.

Now she has dropped out of the world top five, to seventh, but her pedigree suggests she should not be ruled out for the showcase Paris tournament.

"I'm a fighter," Capriati said in Berlin. "Others give up but I don't. I just dig deeper."

I will not return

FROM PAGE 13

on its last tour of India in 1999, urged both sides, victims of the 17-month stand-off between the rival neighbours, to shun the politics and restore full sporting ties.

"For the sake of billions of fans in both countries we should revive cricketing ties," he said.

Wasim is set to play for English county club Hampshire until September.

Ban on Shoib

FROM PAGE 13

"Shoib is his own worst enemy and this is his last chance to revive his career," said Zia.

Akhtar responded to criticism in style as he bowled with fire in all the four matches here, grabbing seven wickets.

Pakistani manager Haroon Rashid said his team would feel Akhtar's absence in the final, but would definitely try to put in an impressive performance.

"Disappointment is natural," Rashid said after the verdict.

"As far as the final is concerned, we've come here with 15 players and will enter the field with a positive frame of mind. It was a fair hearing and we accept the match-referee's decision."

Capriati has fond memories of the German Open, where she

reached the semi-finals as a bubbly 15-year-old in 1991.

Her promising career was later derailed when she lost interest in the sport and dabbled in drugs.

She was staging a remarkable comeback which eventually took her to the number one spot when she reached the Berlin final in 2001 a few weeks before winning the French Open.

Now she has dropped out of the world top five, to seventh, but her pedigree suggests she should not be ruled out for the showcase Paris tournament.

"I'm a fighter," Capriati said in Berlin. "Others give up but I don't. I just dig deeper."

I will not return

FROM PAGE 13

on its last tour of India in 1999, urged both sides, victims of the 17-month stand-off between the rival neighbours, to shun the politics and restore full sporting ties.

"For the sake of billions of fans in both countries we should revive cricketing ties," he said.

Wasim is set to play for English county club Hampshire until September.

One and only Ronaldo

FROM PAGE 13

Williams who presented her with the Laureus Statuette.

Speed climber Dean Potter won the Laureus World Alternative Sportsperson of the year award.

There was also an American flavour to a fourth award as Chinese basketball star Yao Ming was voted Laureus World Newcomer of the Year for his outstanding performance in his first season with Houston Rockets.

Australia's Michael Milton, who lost a leg as a child because of bone cancer, was named Laureus World Alternative Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability.

There were two special awards. Hollywood film legend Arnold Schwarzenegger won the Laureus

Sport for Good Award for his work for the Inner City Games. And Laureus World Sports Academy member Gary Player received the Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his magnificent golfing career.

Ronaldo's award came after the disappointment of the 1998 World Cup final defeat against France in Paris and a series of long-term career-threatening injuries. He scored the two goals for Brazil which won the World Cup final in Yokohama last summer against Germany.

He said: "I always thought I would make it back. I never thought to leave it. I love this game. I was working the whole day because this is my game, my passion and every day I was thinking to come back, come back, come back. That's why all the time I was thinking. Now I'm back."

"When we qualified for the

World Cup, for the first time Brazil was not one of the favourite teams. It gives us a lot of time to think, a lot of time to prepare with calm. It was quite good preparation for us to reach our fifth World Cup."

"This is my first year in Real Madrid. What I want to do is remain in the club because I'm happy. I want to win the league with Real Madrid and remain as many years as possible in Real Madrid."

When asked if he would ever play in England, he said: "I don't know. Like I said before, I've been in Madrid for a year. I'm happy there. I would like to remain a lot of time."

In the Laureus World Comeback of the Year category, Ronaldo, 26, beat Alpine skier Janica Kostelic, US Open tennis champion Pete Sampras, German swimmer Franziska van Almsick and multi-sport champion skier Hermann Maier of Austria.

Brazil won the Laureus World Team of the Year award ahead of European Champions League winners Real Madrid, for whom Ronaldo also plays, Olympic ice hockey champions Canada, dominant Formula One constructors Ferrari and the European Ryder Cup team.

To win the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year award, Lance Armstrong, 31, had to beat a formidable collection of the world's great sports stars multi-Olympic biathlon gold medallist Ole Einar Bjoerndalen, Ronaldo, who was also nominated in this category, Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher and golf No.1 Tiger Woods.

The awards were presented in nine categories.

know that I maybe deserve the award, because you're up against fantastic company. Schumacher, Woods, Ronaldo, as well. It's an honour. It's humbling to win something like that. You know, it's nice to be selected by a board or a group of people that are fans and experts of sport. It was a surprise to me. I didn't expect that. Who knows, it's one of those things where you want to continue racing bikes or being active in sport. So hopefully I'll be a nominee again."

Serena Williams won her award in one of the toughest categories in this year's Laureus World Sports Awards, having to beat track and field world-beaters Marion Jones and Paula Radcliffe, top women's golfer Annika Sorenstam and Chinese basketball sensation Yao Ming.

Yao Ming won the Laureus World Newcomer of the Year award ahead of European Champions League winners Real Madrid, for whom Ronaldo also plays, Olympic ice hockey champions Canada, dominant Formula One constructors Ferrari and the European Ryder Cup team.

The Awards Ceremony was completed with the presentation of the Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award to golfing great Gary Player in recognition of his magnificent sporting career and the work he has done for underprivileged children in South Africa through the Player Foundation.

The awards were presented in nine categories.

team and still England beat them in an innings and 209 runs in the first Test at Lord's.

All have since quit the international stage with Flower and paceman Henry Olonga the latest departures following their black arm-band protest against Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe at the World Cup.

Of those that remain only Grant Flower has a Test hundred to his name while captain and fast bowler Heath Streak is the only player in the party to have taken more than 50 wickets at this level.

They at least have some experience of the seam-bowling friendly conditions prevalent at Lord's in May which are likely to be unfamiliar to most of their team-mates.

However Zimbabwe's on-field

has an opportunity to see it and the finer details of touring it around the country will be determined at a later date.

Sutherland said he did not know the cap had been in England for so long, but described it as an item of rare wealth.

"Since I heard about it I've been trying to wrack my brains to try and think of something more significant as an item of cricket history, even of Australian sporting history," he said.

If successfully purchased, the cap would be put on display in an Australian museum, the ACB said.

Sutherland said it was vital the cap was returned to Australia.

The result of the campaign is for us to take custody of it and from them then obviously we need to take good care of it," Sutherland said on Wednesday.

"But beyond that we want to make sure the Australian public

worries could yet be eclipsed by anti-Mugabe protesters. One group warned they would not be held responsible for "any chaos and mayhem" that ensued after their request for a spot to conduct their protest inside the ground was turned down on Tuesday.

Zimbabwe's off-spinning all-rounder Douglas Marillier has more reason than most to hope the game passes off uninterrupted.

Back in 1994 Marillier, then 16, was involved in a car crash that left him with two broken legs and fears that he might never walk again let alone play cricket.

"We've had a lot of comments coming at us about how a strong a side we are," Marillier said Tuesday. "But if I drop 20 catches, make two golden ducks and get nought for 150, as long as I play at

Lord's it doesn't really bother me."

The second Test in Durham is due to start on June 5.

SQUADS

ENGLAND (from): Nasser Hussain (captain), James Anderson, Mark Butcher, Ashley Giles, Stephen Harmison, Matthew Hoggard, Robert Key, James Kirtley, Anthony McGrath, Alec Stewart, Marcus Trescothick, Michael Vaughan.

ZIMBABWE: Mark Vermeulen, Dion Ibrahim, Stuart Carlisle, Grant Flower, Tatenda Taibu, Sean Ervine, Heath Streak (captain), Andy Blignaut, Travis Friend, Raymond Price, Douglas Hondo.

Magura cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Faruk Smriti Sangsad recorded a 76-run victory over Udayan Sporting Club in the last match of the second round in the Econo Cricket League at the Magura Stadium yesterday.

Faruk Smriti won the toss and were all out for 170 in 35.3 overs. Udayan managed only 94 runs in 24.3 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

FARUK SMRITI SANGSAD: 170 all out in 35.3 overs (Haradhan 26, Sabuj 18, Mohid 11; Sumon 5/10, Tapu 2/33, Masud 1/13).

UDAYAN SPORTING CLUB: 94 all out in 24.3 overs (Babul 16, Imran 9, Sajal 5; Rony 3/20, Tuhin 3/31, Mezbah 2/18).

Result : Faruk Smriti Sangsad won by 76 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Sumon of Udayan Sporting Club.

Take Zim

FROM PAGE 13

Hussain said: "We played some exceptional Test cricket, except against Australia and some of the series have only been three or two matches long.

"We're not the side we used to be. The side has changed incredibly in the last year or so, so we've got to kick on again."

Hussain, who was in charge when England boycotted their World Cup match in Zimbabwe appeared unconcerned by the prospect of demonstrations by protesters opposed to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

"People have a right to protest," Hussain insisted.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Picture showing Eiffel Tower by night. Paris has officially confirmed its bid to host the Summer Olympic Games in 2012.

Paris bids for 2012 Games

REUTERS, Paris

Paris has officially confirmed its bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympics, 22 months after losing out on the 2008 Games to Beijing.

New York, Madrid, Havana, Leipzig and London have entered the 2012 race. Moscow should officially join them on Friday and a Brazilian bid is also expected from Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo.

"We are claiming the honour of staging the 2012 Olympic Games," the Mayor of the French capital, Bertrand Delanoe, told a media conference on Wednesday.

"We are here to win," Delanoe added, surrounded by many top French athletes, including the Sports Minister and former fencing champion Jean-Francois Lamour and Olympic champions Jean Galfione, Colette Besson, David Douillet and Marie-Claire Restoux.

"I am proud to carry this bid, with you," said Lamour.

Galfione, pole vault gold medalist at Atlanta in 1996, said: "It is a child's dream to go to the Games. I hope an enormous amount of French people will be given the opportunity to live this moment."

Other high profile French athletes sent messages of support, including triple Olympic champion Marie-José Perec.

"My heart and soul are with

you," she said.

Real Madrid midfielder Zinedine Zidane, a central figure in the France team that won soccer's World Cup as hosts in 1998, was confident the bid would succeed.

"Because victory is based on time and experience, I am sure that Paris's bid, which we supported in Moscow for the 2008 Games, will make the difference this time," he said in his message.

Cities have until July 15 to declare their bids. The winner will be announced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in July 2005.

Philippe Baudillon will be in charge of the bid committee, as he was for the 1992 Games, when Barcelona was preferred to Paris.

Delanoe insisted the French bid would be dedicated to "sport, the athletes, the audience and mostly to sporting values".

"We want the Games to be a symbol of the civilisation, at the service of peace and at the service of life," he said.

"To sum up the spirit of the bid, I would say it would be 'professionalism and simplicity'."

"We needed this challenge to keep our place on the international stage," said Henri Strandour, president of the French Olympic Committee.

Sorenstam to make golf history

Golf

REUTERS, London

Karsten Braasch during the 1998 Australian Open.

The match took place after the Americans, who had yet to win a grand slam title between them at the time, had boasted they could beat a top 200-ranked male player.

Braasch, ranked 203 and aged 30 at the time, immediately took the sisters up on their offer.

A heavy smoker in the twilight of his career, Braasch hardly broke sweat as he destroyed Serena 6-1, before ripping apart Venus 6-2.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM

immediately afterwards.

Sorenstam, very wisely, has made no such boasts.

"I'm curious to see how good my game is," she said.

"Now I'm here...I personally feel like I've got nothing to lose. Nobody expects anything from me. I expect to play well."

Sorenstam has found an ally in Woods though while her LPGA peers, including Britain's Laura Davies and South Korea's Pak Se Ri, have offered unstinting support.

Sorenstam, herself, has repeatedly said she does not want to become involved in a "battle of the sexes".