

Cairns sidelined

CRICINFO, London

New Zealand star all-rounder Chris Cairns will be out for six weeks after breaking a bone in his left hand during the final day of Nottinghamshire's county championship match against Warwickshire at Edgbaston on Saturday.

Cairns sustained the injury when he dropped a chance from Warwickshire's Dougie Brown at slip.

"I can't find the words to describe just how massively disappointed I am to suffer this injury at a crucial time in the one-day season," Cairns said.

"It's the first break I've suffered in a 15-year career as a cricketer and it's come as a huge blow to find out it's come now."

"It's the lesser of two evils with it being my left hand that's broken. But I'm still going to be out for six weeks, and that's hard to take."

Cairns has been dogged by injury over the last year, suffering injuries to his knee, side and shoulder.

Venus to play in Fed Cup

AFP, New York

Former world number one Venus Williams was named here Monday to the United States Fed Cup team that will host Italy in a quarter-final tie July 19-20 in Washington.

Williams, 22, has won four Grand Slam singles crowns and took 2000 Olympic gold in both singles and doubles. She lost to top-ranked youngster sister Serena in four consecutive Slam finals through this year's Australian Open.

But Venus Williams has struggled this year, losing four matches and falling to fourth in the WTA rankings released Monday. She was ousted by Russia's Vera Zvonareva in the fourth round of the French Open last week.

The US-Italy winner advances to the four-team Fed Cup World Finals.

Venus and Serena Williams combined to help a US sweep of the Czech Republic in the first round in April, but so far Serena has not committed to a return.

"I'm looking forward to playing Fed Cup," Venus Williams said. "I'm sold. I love it. I love playing for the team."

Venus made her Fed Cup debut in 1999 against Italy in a semi-final and won 3-0. She also helped the US team beat Russia in the 1999 final.

"Venus is one of the marquee names in women's sports and I am thrilled that she has committed to represent our country," US Fed Cup captain Billie Jean King said.

MSC to boycott

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Signed by club general secretary Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan, the letter also stated their intention to abstain from the ceremony.

The club asked Asghar to look into the matter and instruct the CCDM to settle it in accordance with the by-laws.

Woolmer slams

FROM PAGE 13

He added that he had cautioned Smith against accepting the captaincy when it was offered to him in the wake of Shaun Pollock's sacking.

"I pleaded with him not to take the captaincy but to rather wait until he was 26, more experienced and more settled in the side so he could handle all the pressures."

As South Africa prepare for what is sure to be a closely contested series in England, Woolmer - who played for Warwickshire, and England - said he considered himself a South African, though he felt dismayed at the about-turn in the nation's cricketing fortunes. "I feel more like a masochist at the moment because the state of our sport really hurts me," he said. "I wish I knew what was going on in our cricket because at the moment it is a complete mess."

Azhar ready to step up

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, London

Essex might not have been ready for Azhar Mahmood when he ripped through their line-up with figures of 6-37 on Sunday.

They were not expecting to face him until two days later, when Pakistan visited Chelmsford for a tour match ahead of their three-match one-day series against The Oval.

But Mahmood gained permission to play a final match with his county before joining the tourists this week, and he left Essex in tatters.

On Tuesday, the Chelmsford fans had something to cheer about as a Mahmood-less Pakistan succumbed to a 50-run defeat at New Writtle Road.

And the tourists will be especially desperate for the all-rounder to maintain his fine start to the England season when they take on England at Old Trafford on 17 June.

With Shoaib Akhtar serving the final part of a three-match ban for ball-tampering is the only senior member of the attack, and is likely to open the bowling.

That would be a remarkable turnaround for a man who made just a single appearance for Pakistan during the World Cup - he did not take the field in a wash-out - and has not played since.

Pakistan's chief selector Aamir

Sohail said the 28-year-old had been recalled because of his "excellent form with the bat and the ball" for Surrey.

So far this year he has taken 13 one-day wickets at a miserly average of 18.38, as well as 19 in the Championship, and scored 447 runs in both forms of the game.

But it is not just the defending county champions who have gained from Mahmood's first full season at The Oval.

AZHAR MAHMOOD

Surrey coach Keith Medlycott believes the all-rounder has prospered because of the quality of the south London Test venue and the attitude of a team that has not lost a match this season.

"We have played on some high quality wickets, which is always helpful," Medlycott told the BBC Sport website.

"And we play with freedom so unlike some other overseas players he doesn't have to come in and prove himself or be fearful of getting out."

Mahmood as yo-yoed in and out of the Pakistan line-up since his debut against India in Toronto in 1996.

But for Medlycott there was never any question as to his quality with both bat and ball.

"It's surprising that internationally he hasn't been given a full crack because he has real quality, as we saw when he toured with Pakistan two years ago" he says.

"He is destructive especially at the start and end of the innings, both with bat and ball."

"But his biggest strength is his hunger - he has the heart of a lion and just loves a challenge."

Mahmood's biggest break has come, though, because of an all-rounder who currently plies his trade across town with Middlesex.

Speaking to this website in 2002, between spells as Pakistan coach, Richard Pybus said: "In any other cricket-playing country, such a wonderful all-rounder would have his permanent place."

"But for Pakistan, it's a question of choice between him and Abdur Razzaq."

Razzaq was passed over by the selectors, who described him as "tired" prior to this trip.

In his place they have a veteran of 124 one-day internationals ready to step up and make a claim to a more permanent place.

Anna hit by new injury blow

AFP, Birmingham

Struggling glamour girl Anna Kournikova could have to miss Wimbledon after she pulled out of the WTA tournament here on Monday because of a longstanding back injury.

The 22-year-old Russian - a former Wimbledon semi-finalist - has been diagnosed as suffering from a chronic lumbar dysfunction and has also had to withdraw from the Eastbourne tournament next week.

With Wimbledon starting in a fortnight the fading former top 10 player faces a race against time to be fit as she attempts to revive her career.

Still searching for her first career title on the women's tour, Kournikova has this year suffered the worst slump of her career, dropping out of the world's top 50 as a result of poor form and injuries.

"I'm very disappointed, actually devastated, not to be able to play in Birmingham," she said.

"Grass is my favourite surface and I love playing in England so having to pull out because of my back is the last thing I wanted."

Kournikova aggravated the injury last Thursday and had a bandage applied to her lower back.

"I came to Birmingham on Sunday and practised on site and again today. The trainer taped me for the practice but afterwards I knew I had to see the trainer again.

"I've been advised not to play this week or next week and I don't know any further than that. They said my injury was chronic because it keeps coming back."

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PHOTO: AP

Dutch Richard Krajicek serves to Australia's Mark Philippoussis in the first round of the Stella Artois tennis tournament at Queens Club in London on Monday.

Mixed day for big servers

Tennis

AFP, London

With defending champion Lleyton Hewitt, crowd favourite Tim Henman and Andre Agassi not playing until Tuesday, top billing on the first day of the Queen's Club tournament fell to big-serving duo Mark Philippoussis, the 1997 winner, and former Wimbledon champion Richard Krajicek.

Krajicek, who won Wimbledon in 1996, eventually triumphed 7-6, 6-3 in just under two hours, but Philippoussis was left to rue a string of missed chances against his unseeded opponent.

As expected, the match was dominated by aces and returns, with Philippoussis making all the early running. Unfortunately for the Australian, though, his touch deserted him at the crucial moment and he squandered four break points.

Two of those points were for the first set, but Krajicek produced big serves on both occasions to deny Philippoussis what would have been a deserved lead.

With parity maintained, the match drifted to a tie break and once Krajicek has powered through it 7-3, he had little trouble wrapping up the second set 6-3.

Another former Wimbledon

champion who accepted a wildcard invitation to the event was popular Croatian Goran Ivanisevic.

At his peak, Goran was one of the most feared grass court players around, but injury appears to have taken its toll and Janacek took immediate advantage.

The tall Czech eased past the 2002 Wimbledon champion to book his place in the second round and a meeting with Krajicek, winning 6-2, 6-2, but Ivanisevic was clearly troubled by an injury.

Several times during the match he needed treatment and although massages on his forearm gave temporary relief, the most powerful weapon in his armoury, the serve, was being severely hampered and he looked a shadow of the player who broke Henman's heart at Wimbledon two years ago.

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"Having done against them before gives you a little confidence, but having just seen the side they put out in Sharjah in April, it's completely different to the one we played against in the World Cup," explained Anderson.

"They're trying to build a new team to be as good as it has been in the past. They have got some good young players in there so I think it could even be a tougher series of matches than the World Cup."

He may also have a few more tricks up his sleeve to bamboozle Pakistan once again having spent the time between the end of the World Cup and the start of this summer attempting to perfect new deliveries to add to his already impressive armoury.

"If you keep doing the same thing then batsmen will work you out eventually. When you're playing against the best in the world, you're going to have to improve your game if you want to do well against them and by trying to do that, I'm hoping it will stand me in good stead."

"I've been working on a few things in the nets," he added.

"They're just minor things, but I'm trying to keep one step ahead of everyone else."

"People may have seen the way I bowl on the television during the winter so I'm hoping to have a couple of surprise elements to show people during the summer."

"I've not developed a mystery ball or anything like that, but I believe that once you get to that high level you always have to keep improving to try and stay one step ahead of everyone else."

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