

Hopman Cup Slovaks in final at Aussie cost

AFP, Perth

The drama continued at the one million dollar (750,000 US) Hopman Cup international mixed team tennis tournament Friday after hosts tennis Australia forfeited its place in the final against the United States.

Australia's leading women's player Alicia Molik announced she would not compete after again tearing a tendon in her left foot in a single's match on Thursday.

Her decision thrust the Slovak Republic into the limelight with the pairing of Daniela Hantuchova and Karol Kucera now taking Australia's place.

They will meet the American duo of Lindsay Davenport and James Blake at the Burswood Dome here on Saturday.

Drug scandal Rusedski pleads innocence

AFP, London

British number two Greg Rusedski has vowed to clear his name after confirming he has tested positive for the banned substance nandrolone.

"In response to media inquiries, I can confirm that I have been advised by the ATP anti-doping administrator that a sample I provided tested positive for a low concentration of nandrolone metabolites," the player said in a statement on Thursday.

"There is an (ATP) hearing to be held in Montreal on February 9 which I shall attend. I fully expect to be found innocent."

"I wish to make it clear that I do not and never have taken performance enhancing drugs," the Canadian-born Briton, who holds the record for the world's fastest serve, added.

"This is a very complex situation which once understood will clearly demonstrate my total innocence."

Earlier Thursday, the 30-year-old Rusedski, who was tested at the ATP tournament in Indianapolis on July 23 last year, had been knocked out of the Adelaide event, his first outing since playing for Britain in the Davis Cup in Morocco in September.

Reds burst

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Munna, the maverick playmaker, was also instrumental in Muktiyoddha's second goal as his accurate free kick from the left flank found an unguarded Toe who just gave the finishing touch with a back header in the 61st minute (2-0).

Sheikh Russell, who were unusually subdued, finally came to life after conceding the second goal. In the 75th minute veteran midfielder Asif found the net with right-footed volley from a Rashidi pass (1-2).

Moroccan forward Rashidi could have easily leveled the margin in the next minute when he got the ball in front of an open net. But his indecision allowed Harry to clear the ball.

Red card: Harry (Muktiyoddha).

Yellow cards: Burdifi Mohammad, Jalaluddin (Sheikh Russell) and Riyadh (Muktiyoddha).

TEAMS

Muktiyoddha Sangsadd: Aminul, Hasan Al-Mamun, Prodeep, Harry, Riyadh (Papel), Bidiyut, Matuur Munna, Ghansha, Moni, Arcedia Toe and Kanchan.

Sheikh Russell KC: Apel (Biplab), Narayan, Kamal, Biplab, Burdifi Mohammad, Abdullah, Abdel Ali, Asif Yusuf, Rashidi and Milan.

Referee: R Alam.

DHAKA WANDERERS-1; BADDA JAGARANI-0

Earlier, in the day's first match, Dhaka Wanderers Club registered their first Premier League win a solitary goal victory over Badda Jagarani Sangsadd.

After a barren first half, Mujibur Rahman Ritu scored the all-important match winner from a penalty in the 81st minute after Badda keeper Al-Amin had fouled Wanderers striker Williams inside the danger area.

With that win Wanderers raised their tally to five points from six matches while the Badda were glued to four points on completion of their sixth outing.

Fleming praises 'new' Pakistan



REUTERS, Christchurch

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming has heaped praise on the Pakistan side leading up to the third one-day international on Saturday.

Fleming, who led New Zealand the last time Pakistan toured three years ago, said the current squad was much more unified than he has bitterly-divided team of 2001 and had a more measured approach to the game.

"We were given a valuable lesson in one-day batting in Queenstown and our guys have taken on board just how Imran (Farhat) and Yousuf Youhana worked us around," Flemingsaid.

"That was something that was

unusual for Pakistan -- taking the quick singles and really working a team over. We've learnt from that and hopefully we can put it into practice tomorrow."

With the expected return from a groin injury of paceman Shoaib Akhtar, Fleming said his presence provided an additional challenge for his team.

"We like to play against the best, even if he does bowl at 155 kmh. Hayden c Yuvraj b Agarkar 20

Ponting c and b Balaji 18

Martyn c Balaji b Agarkar 0

Symonds c Kumble b Agarkar 88

Clarke c Laxman b Kumble 63

Bevan c Ganguly b Sehwa 1

Harvey c Tendulkar b Agarkar 28

Bichel run out 1

Gillespie not out 8

Williams c Yuvraj b Agarkar 0

Extras: (lb-10, w-14, nb-3) 27

Total: (All out in 48.3 overs) 288

Fall of wickets: 1-59, 2-70, 3-70, 4-89, 5-232, 6-233, 7-258, 8-272, 9-287, 10-288.

"They've won games for New Zealand in the past and we need to see some action. We don't expect them all to fire at once, but fire they must at some stage."

Fleming said the problem with the team in the two matches to date had been the poor batting starts, which both times have been rescued by the lower order.

did concede, however, that a decision to play was the bowler's alone.

Fleming said he was hoping for more from his experienced core of players, like Chris Cairns and Craig McMillan, who had yet to deliver in the series.

While not naming anyone in particular, the skipper said the experienced players had to drive the team and drive the game.

"These players need to respond," Flemingsaid.

"They've won games for New Zealand in the past and we need to see some action. We don't expect them all to fire at once, but fire they must at some stage."

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Ronaldo fined for London trip

SKY SPORTS

Reports in Spain claim that Real Madrid have fined Brazilian striker Ronaldo for his trip to London this week.

The hit-man flew to London on Wednesday for a promotional visit, but his presence sparked rumours that he had been invited by Chelsea to attend their game with Liverpool



RONALDO

with a view to possible transfer talks.

These claims were strongly denied by both the player and Real, however, according to Radio Marca, the reigning Spanish champions have now decided to punish the South American for his actions.

The station reports that Ronaldo will be acted against because he failed to inform anybody at the club of his trip before he left.

Madrid insist the move is in line with standard club policy, and revealed that no further investigation into the incident will be launched.

For his part, the 27-year-old was quick to play down the controversial trip, stating: "I was in England for a photo session with a company that sponsor me, and there was nothing strange about the journey."

Cruzeiro amazes Rivaldo

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Rivaldo said he hoped his move to Cruzeiro would make him happy again after receiving a jubilant reception from fans before his official presentation by the Brazilian champions on Thursday.

Television pictures showed security attempting to open a path to allow the Brazilian World Cup winner through the crowd after he arrived at Belo Horizonte's Pampulha airport, where an estimated 250 fans greeted him.

The former World Player of the Year joined Cruzeiro on Monday a little over a month after being released by AC Milan, where he had been relegated to the reserve team.

The 31-year-old forward is returning to play in his homeland for the first time in seven years, during which he also played for Spanish clubs Deportivo Coruna and Barcelona.

At Cruzeiro's training ground, Rivaldo said he was confident he could put his career back on track after an unhappy 18 months in Italy.

"I want to be happy again, especially after what happened at Milan, which was a very difficult situation for me," he said.

Rivaldo, who kept his place in the Brazil team despite his problems in Italy, also said the move would benefit his future with the national side.

"Now I'm in Brazil, (Brazil coach Carlos Alberto) Parreira can follow my progress better," he said.

He praised Cruzeiro's facilities, saying they were comparable to the best clubs in Europe.

"Cruzeiro's installations are certainly not behind Barcelona or Milan," he told reporters. "I think they're slight better than Milan's, I'm greatly impressed."

"I'd never visited Cruzeiro before and I'm surprised to discover that we have this sort of thing in Brazil, not just abroad."

Rivaldo will lead Cruzeiro's challenge this year as they defend the Brazilian title and attempt to win the Libertadores Cup, the South American equivalent of the Champions League, for the third time.

"I wanted to play in the Libertadores -- it's a title I haven't conquered yet," he said. "The team has a lot of quality. I'm sure we can bring a lot of happiness to the fans."

Rivaldo has been reunited with Cruzeiro coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo, who was in charge of Rivaldo in the memorable Palmeiras team during the mid 1990s as well as the Brazil squad which won the 1999 Copa America.

"It's important to have the confidence of the coach," said Rivaldo. "He is making history in Brazilian football and I owe a lot to him. He's a great coach, he knows my capabilities and I know I won't have any problems with him."

Primera Liga preview

Real face bogey prospect



AFP, Madrid

League leaders Real Madrid have been accused of complacency against lowly opposition this season but it is unlikely the reigning Spanish champions will take Real Sociedad too lightly on Saturday.

The Basques are just above the relegation zone but Sociedad were second behind Madrid last season and, by common consent, have suffered at the hands of some erratic refereeing this season.

They were finally able to show their true colours last Sunday and emerged 2-1 winners at Malaga.

"I think you finally saw what we are capable of with that victory, and the way we played," commented Sociedad coach Raynald Denoueix earlier this week.

Making the Frenchman even happier will be the return of his first-choice goalkeeper Sander Westerveld and striker Darko Kovacevic, after injury kept the pair out of last weekend's trip to the Costa Del Sol.

Kovacevic is a talismanic figure against Madrid and scored twice in Sociedad's 4-2 victory over their illustrious visitors last season, as well as contributing one goal in their 3-0 win the season before.

In total, the Serb has scored on five of the six occasions Real Madrid have visited the San Sebastian-based side and he has been playing.

For Madrid it will be their second trip to the Basque country in a week, after their lacklustre 1-1 draw against second division Eibar in the Spanish Cup on Wednesday, although admittedly Real fielded what was effectively a reserve team.

"It was important we held something back because I am also thinking about Real Sociedad," said Real coach Carlos Queiroz, demonstrating the importance he is placing on Saturday's fixture.

Real will have to face Sociedad without their injured England captain David Beckham.

Beckham is still recovering from the ankle injury he sustained last week during Real's 1-0 win over Murcia, which required four stitches.

"I'm not fit to play on Saturday. When I go to strike the ball it feels painful," Beckham told reporters at Real's training complex on Thursday.

He will be replaced by Spanish international Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez, who is determined to retain the place he had to concede when Beckham arrived last summer.

"This is a new phase for me. This position, in the centre of the field, is very comfortable for me but I am very aware that it is going to be very difficult to hang on to it," said Guti on Thursday.

If Madrid can get their first points in the Anoeta stadium for three years, then it will extend their championship lead.

Real have 42 points from 18 games, two ahead of second-placed Valencia who play at

Albacete earlier on Saturday.

Valencia coach Rafa Benitez is expected to name the same starting 11 that were impressive 4-2 winners at home to Villarreal on Sunday, with the exception of the suspended Spanish international midfielder Vicente Rodriguez.

Vicente's enforced absence means that Benitez may decide to push Mista Ferrer out on the left wing and use Ricardo Oliveira as the main target man.

Meanwhile, Barcelona languish down in 12th after last week's humiliating 3-0 defeat at Racing Santander and are starting to face the prospect of finishing in the second half of the table for the first time since 1942.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta admitted on Thursday that he was negotiating to sign Juventus' Edgar Davids as a short term remedy, but even if the battling Dutch midfielder decides to follow in the footsteps of so many of his compatriots, he will not arrive in time to face Real Zaragoza on Sunday.

FIXTURES

Saturday (kick off GMT): Albacete v Valencia (1830), Real Mallorca v Celta Vigo (1830), Real Sociedad v Real Madrid (2030)
Sunday: Real Betis v Malaga (1600), Deportivo La Coruna v Racing Santander (1600), Osasuna v Sevilla (1600), Murcia v Espanol (1600), Villarreal v Valladolid (1600), Barcelona v Real Zaragoza (1800), Athletic Bilbao (2000)

India falter at the death

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Agarkar struck twice in two balls in his next over, the 11th, when he dismissed opener Matthew Hayden for 20 and had Damien Martyn caught at fine leg for a first-ball duck.

Ponting was caught and bowled by Lakshmithipathy Balaji for 18 in the 16th over as Australia slumped from 59 without loss to 89-4.

Left-hander Michael Bevan (1) fell cheaply to Sehwa's off break bowling but Harvey paced Australia's innings in the closing overs before becoming Agarkar's fifth victim.

Australia host Zimbabwe at Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday in the second match of the triangular series.

Ponting said he was conscious of the need for Australia to improve their fielding.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the triangular one-day

series match between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday:

AUSTRALIA				
Gilchrist c Pathan b Agarkar	34			
Hayden c Yuvraj b Agarkar	20			
Ponting c and b Balaji	18			
Martyn c Balaji b Agarkar	0			
Symonds c Kumble b Agarkar	88			
Clarke c Laxman b Kumble	63			
Bevan c Ganguly b Sehwa	1			
Harvey c Tendulkar b Agarkar	28			
Bichel run out	1			
Gillespie not out	8			
Williams c Yuvraj b Agarkar	0			
Extras: (lb-10, w-14, nb-3)	27			
Total: (All out in 48.3 overs)	288			
Fall of wickets: 1-59, 2-70, 3-70, 4-89, 5-232, 6-233, 7-258, 8-272, 9-287, 10-288.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Agarkar	9.3	1	42	6
Pathan	10	0	61	0
Balaji	9	0	52	1
Kumble	10	0	56	1
Bangar	3	0	19	0
Ganguly	5	0	40	0
Sehwa	2	1	8	1
INDIA				

Sehwa b Harvey	35			
Tendulkar c Ponting b Symonds	63			
Ganguly run out (Harvey)	82			
Laxman c Clarke b Symonds	16			
Dravid c Harvey b Clarke	16			
Yuvraj c Clarke b Harvey	25			
Bangar c Ponting b Harvey	3			
Agarkar c Clarke b Gillespie	1			
Pathan c Hayden b Williams	3			
Kumble c Clarke b Williams	5			
Balaji not out	0			
Extras: (b-1, lb-8, w-11, nb-1)	21			
Total: (All out in 49 overs)	270			
Fall of wickets: 1-103, 2-134, 3-168, 4-195, 5-257, 6-257, 7-260, 8-263, 9-266, 10-270.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Gillespie	10	1	50	1
Williams	9	0	52	2
Bichel	6	0	38	0
Harvey	10	1	52	3
Symonds	10	0	47	2
Clarke	4	0	22	1
Result: Australia won by 18 runs.				
Man-of-the-match: A. Symonds (AUS)				
Toss: Australia				

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country yesterday:

CHITTAGONG V BARISAL				
Venue: Comilla Stadium				
BARISAL				
Rashedur b Debrobata	2			
Imran st Arif b Yasin	46			
Jamal run out	76			
Nahidul b Masum	13			
Nayan b Yasin	27			
Salaudddin c Faisal b Sabbir	12			
Mustadir b Debrobata	3			
Towhid not out	1			
Arman not out	2			
Extras: (b-5, lb-7, nb-1, w-9)	22			
Total: (For 7 wks in 50 overs)	204			
Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-76, 3-100, 4-156, 5-188, 6-197, 7-200				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Debrobata	6	1	18	2
Obaidul	4	1	21	0
Sabbir	10	1	43	1
Yasin	10	0	47	2
Ahsanullah	10	1	27	0
Masum	10	0	36	1
CHITTAGONG				
Anisul b Anisur	17			
Salaudddin b Anisur	18			
Masum b Tariqul	53			
Faisal st Nayan b Mustadir	17			
Akram not out	61			
Arif c Bikash b Tariqul	8			
Sabbir run out	10			
Ahsanullah b Mustadir	2			
Yasin run out	2			
Obaidul not out	5			
Extras: (lb-6, nb-2, w-7)	15			
Total: (For 8 wks in 49.4 overs)	208			
Fall of wickets: 1-30, 2-45, 3-87, 4-141, 5-153, 6-186, 7-189, 8-200				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Anisur	10	1	47	2

Arman	10	0	34	0
Salaudddin	8.4	1	32	0
Mustadir	9	0	33	2
Tariqul	10	0	47	2
Imran	2	0	9	0
Result: Chittagong won by two wickets.				
Man-of-the-match: Akram Khan (Chittagong)				

DHAKA V SYLHET				
Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium				
DHAKA				
Al-Shahriar c Rezaul b Parvez	33			
Razzak b Rezaul	7			
Mehrab run out	82			
Sanwar c Rana b Masud	71			
Naimur lbw b Ejaz	16			
Kadir c Imtiaz b Ejaz	5			
Neeyamur c Mabud b Ejaz	21			
Sajjad st Mabud b Ejaz	10			
Masudur not out	0			
Extras: (b-8, lb-9, w-10)	27			
Total: (For 8 wks in 47 overs)	272			
Fall of wks: 1-27, 2-55, 3-184, 4-209, 5-215, 6-258, 7-270, 8-272				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Rezaul	10	1	36	1
Sami	5	0	31	0
Parvez	5	0	27	1
Nabil	10	0	46	0
Imtiaz	2	0	18	0
Masud	6	0	49	1
Ejaz	9	0	48	4
SYLHET				
Mabud lbw b Elias	12			
Imtiaz b Ashrafu	21			
Parvez b Ashrafu	4			
Nasirul run out	31			
Mouwla b Elias	42			
Rana run out	2			
Rezaul c Sajjad b Mehrab	16			
Ejaz run out	6			