

Agassi in Roddick's half

Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne

Andre Agassi, shooting for a record five Australian Opens, was on Friday pitched into the top half of the draw of this year's tournament with top seed and world No.1 Andy Roddick.

Third seed Juan Carlos Ferrero of Spain was placed in the bottom half along with second seed Roger Federer and Australian hope Lleyton Hewitt.

In the women's draw, Venus Williams, elevated to third seed after finishing an injury-wrecked 2003 ranked 11th, was put into the bottom half away from top seed and favourite Justine Henin-Hardenne.

Venus, who has won four Grand Slam titles, appeared favourably drawn given that second seed Kim Clijsters of Belgium has still to confirm whether she will play because of an ankle injury suffered in the lead-up Hopman Cup in Perth.

Agassi, with his unbeaten 21-match run at the Australian Open, is the most feared player here and he will be vying with last year's beaten finalist Rainer Schuettler in his quarter before a projected semifinal with Roddick.

The 33-year-old American, winner of more than 28 million dollars in career prize-money,

takes on Australian Todd Larkham in the first round.

Roddick, who was paired with Chilean Fernando Gonzalez in the opening round, will have to negotiate a tough quarter featuring Moroccan Younes El Aynaoui, who took him to 21-19 in a marathon fifth set of a five-hour quarterfinal here last year.

Roddick, who last year was the youngest American at 21 years to finish the year as world No.1, will have a potential quarterfinal against unseeded Russian Marat Safin, a runner-up here in 2001, and seventh-seed Carlos Moya, a beaten finalist in 1997. The most appealing match-up in the first round is 10th-seeded Australian Mark Philippoussis against the 2002 champion, Thomas Johansson of Sweden, who is unseeded after missing the entire 2003 season following knee surgery last February.

Federer, the Wimbledon champion, takes on a qualifier in the first round and Ferrero faces Spanish countryman Albert Montanes in the opening round.

Hewitt, the 15th seed who along with Philippoussis is bidding to become the first home winner of the Australian Open since 1976, also faces a qualifier first-up.

"There are some pretty tough first round matches which you really expect in men's tennis these days -- (James) Blake-Moya, Gonzalez-Roddick, Johansson-Philippoussis.

"There are also a lot of dangerous floaters in the draw. You look at a guy like Safin, he's not 77 in the world, he's a top ten player and I don't think anyone would want him in their section as a seeded player," Hewitt said. Safin is currently ranked 86.

"There are a hell of a lot of good players out there and you've got to be wary and give respect to every opponent you play."

Greg Rusedski, fighting steroid charges at a tribunal next month, plays 26th-seeded Spaniard Albert Costa in the first round, while British compatriot Tim Henman faces Frenchman Jean-Rene Lisnard.

Justine Henin-Hardenne opens her campaign for a third major title against Australian Olivia Lukaszewicz and is scheduled to meet world No.5 Lindsay Davenport in the quarterfinals.

French world No.4 Amelie Mauresmo, a beaten finalist here in 1999, takes on Taiwan's Chuang Chia-Jung in the first round, and is scheduled to face Russian seventh seed Elena Dementieva in the quarters.

Venus Williams, whose appearance in Hong Kong this month was her first since losing to her sister Serena in last July's Wimbledon final, meets fellow American Ashley Harkleroad first-up and is projected to meet Japanese 10th seed Ai Sugiyama in the quarters.

India finish last

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asia Cup champions India were condemned to last place in the Azlan Shah Cup when their young side lost 4-1 to Spain at the National Hockey Stadium.

India have only one point from their six matches after their latest defeat with a team including ten junior players. Their sole point came from a 2-2 draw against hosts Malaysia.

The win gave Spain a chance of making the playoffs for third and fourth place but will have to wait on the results of two matches later in the day.

Spain scored as early as the sixth minute when Santiago Freixa Escude converted their first penalty corner with Xavier Ribas doubling the advantage in the 20th minute.

India were awarded two penalty corners in the 21st and 24th minutes but the normally reliable Len Aiyappa failed to find the target.

Spain extended their lead in the 42nd minute when Victor Sojo Gimanez deflected a cross by skipper Juan Escarre past a bewildered Indian custodian Adrian de Souza.

India managed to reduce the deficit when Len finally found the mark in the 66th minute but Juan Escarre sealed the win with Spain's fourth goal in the final minute of the match.

Keraniganj cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Kalindi Krija Chakra beat Mandail Shapla Kuri by seven wickets in the inaugural match of the Keraniganj cricket competition yesterday.

Kalindi KC scored 113 for 3 in 16.5 overs in reply to Mandail's 109 all out in 34.3 overs.

Khatib, Bhat

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Later in the evening, State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman distributed prizes among winners.

Chairman of the Rajshahi Tennis Complex (RTC) and BOA Secretary General Zafar Imam, RTC General Secretary Mostaq Ahmed, Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner Miah Mushtaque Ahmed and General Secretary of Bangladesh Tennis Federation Nurul Haq Pradhan were present.

The Dhaka leg is being sponsored by construction company Shletch.

A record number 178 players will take part in four events -- boys' singles, boys' doubles, girls' singles and girls' doubles during the week-long ITF-approved Group-3 competition.

The Bangladesh has selected 13 boys and five girls to play in the qualifying rounds.

The selected boys are: Shahnawaz Ahmed, Alamgir Hossain, Amol Roy, Murad Hossain, Ranjan Ram, Anwar Hossain, Bashir Gazi, Delwar Hossain, Yousof Aman Monty, Henry Pritul Mondal, Mohammad Mixan, Tajmul Islam and Mazharul Islam.

Ishrat Sultana, Mushfiqa Shams, Reefat Sarjin Hossain, Taslima Akhter and Ambrin Hasan Sarker has been selected to represent Bangladesh in the girls' event.

AKC fans target

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denied. We have never experienced anything like this on the football ground," said one photo-journalist of a leading daily who preferred not to be named.

After the match, the aggrieved photographers complained to Abahani's supporters association chief Julu about the incident but he in turn reportedly accused the journalists saying that they had incited the crowd by swearing at their first.

This year's Premier Division league has already seen a number of unfortunate incidents. Yesterday's events only added a new dimension to the prevalent ugly atmosphere and raised concern about the safety of journalists covering football.

2004 Asian Cup

Japan v Iran pick of the draw

Football

AFP, Chongqing

Holders Japan will play Iran in the first round of the 2004 Asian Cup after being drawn in the same group as the middle east heavyweights here Thursday.

With China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Japan all seeded to avoid each other in the first round of the July 17 to August 7 showpiece, all eyes were on who would draw dangerous floaters Iran in the group stage.

There were gasps as Iran were pulled out of the hat to face the

Japanese along with Thailand and Oman in Group D, where all teams will be based in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing.

Though Iran struggled through qualifying, they are traditionally one of the continent's strongest sides and boast Asian player of the year Mehdi Mahdavi.

Japan and Iran's first-round collision on July 28 will be a replay of their famous World Cup play-off in 1997, which the Japanese won 3-2 to qualify for the 1998 finals in France.

China, desperate to build on their dismal World Cup debut in 2002 when they beaten in every game, should be good enough to progress from a Group A which also

contains Qatar, Indonesia and Bahrain.

Misfiring South Korea, who limped into the finals barely a year after their fourth place finish at the World Cup, have awkward-looking opponents in the shape of Kuwait, UAE and Jordan in Group B.

Despite being Asia's best performers at World Cup level -- they have played at every tournament since 1986 -- the South Koreans have not managed to stamp their authority on the Asian Cup, a tournament they last won in 1960.

Group C sees Saudi Arabia, winners of the tournament in 1984, 1988 and 1996 take on the footballers of war-shattered Iraq.

The Iraqis confounded all expectations when they romped into the finals despite their sporting infrastructure being wrecked during the US-led invasion to topple President Saddam Hussein last year.

Two former Soviet republics, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, complete the field.

Saudi Arabia, who were the runners-up to Japan in both the 1992 and 2000 finals, will be favourites to qualify with Iraq and Uzbekistan vying for the remaining berth.

The Asian Cup is Asia's premier international football tournament, having first been held in 1956.

Primera Liga preview

Valencia in dreaded land

Football

AFP, Madrid

Valencia may not have very long to enjoy their role as league leaders because the Spanish fixtures computer has decreed that they must travel to Valladolid on Saturday, their bogey team in recent years.

The 2001-02 champions have not won at Valladolid's Zorrilla stadium for six years and during their glory year of two seasons ago, Valladolid were the only team to beat them at home.

Games are rarely pretty in the Zorrilla, in keeping with its stark location on the outskirts of the industrial city, and there have been only three goals there in the last four encounters between the two sides but Valladolid have repeatedly found how to snuff out Valencia's flame.

"We haven't had much luck with them in recent seasons but I hope that is going to change," said Valencia coach Rafa Benitez.

Valencia are still in contention for the Spanish Cup and UEFA Cup and Benitez has not ruled out them becoming the first Spanish side to achieve the domestic double and

also lift a European trophy, a feat not even Real Madrid managed during their five years they won the European Cup between 1956 and 1960.

"It's very difficult but at the moment we are still in all the competitions so it is still a possibility," added Benitez.

Valencia have the best away record in the Spanish first division this season and have won their last five league games.

On the negative side, Benitez will have to contend with the absences of suspended Argentine playmaker Pablo Aimar and French-born teenage midfielder Mohammed Sissoko who has been called up to Mali's African Nations Cup squad.

Valencia have 43 points from 19 games, the halfway point in the season, and a one point advantage over Real Madrid who travel to Seville to face Real Betis on Sunday.

The reigning Spanish champion's form has dipped over the last few games but their coach Carlos Queiroz went on the offensive on Wednesday and got behind his much-criticised central defenders.

"My priority is to stop leaking goals but the crucial triangle between (goalkeeper) Iker Casillas and (defenders) Francisco Pavon and Raul Bravo doesn't have much experience," said the Portuguese coach.

"However, this triangle does have a great future. Some of our critics have been superficial and, I might almost say, ignorant because they do not know the situation."

David Beckham will be fit to return to the Real midfield on Sunday after sustaining a deep gash on his ankle two weeks ago which forced him to miss the 1-0 loss at Real Sociedad last weekend.

At least, Queiroz can be certain of waking up on Monday morning still in his job but, at the other end of the table, Murcia coach Joaquin Peiro will not be able to sleep so soundly.

Murcia are at the bottom of the Spanish first division and have gone 13 games without a win.

The club's directors gave Peiro - at 67 he is the Spanish first division's most senior coach - their backing this week, but a poor performance at home to Celta Vigo on Saturday could see change of heart.

Dutch international midfielder Edgar Davids could be thrown into the deep end and make his debut for Barcelona against Athletic Bilbao, only five days after joining the erratic Catalan giant.

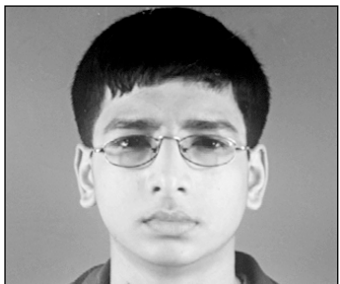
Barca coach Frank Rijkaard has some serious thinking to do about who will play, not only in respect of Davids but also because of his ever-changing list of injured players.

In the wake of Wednesday's Spanish Cup tie with second division Levante, Rijkaard lost his influential Spanish international defender Carles Puyol, out for a month with a fractured cheek bone, and also midfielder Andres Iniesta with a thigh strain.

FIXTURES

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

WHIZZ KID-203



winner

WHIZZ KID-204

correct answers

- 1. Who clinched the Leonine Grand Masters chess title? Ans: Zia
2. Who won the Pepsi Nat'l volleyball women's crown? Ans: BJMC
3. Who won the European footballer-of-the-year award? Ans: Nedved
4. Who became World Youth football champions? Ans: Brazil
5. Who won the FIFA women's player-of-the-year award?

Gilchrist ravages Zimbabwe

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Table with columns: Price, Flower, Matsikenyeri, Matiskenyeri, Extras, Total, Bowler, O, M, R, W. Includes names like Ebrahim c Gilchrist b Symonds, Sibanda c Gilchrist b Lee, etc.

ODI TOP SCORERS

SPORTS REPORTER

Following are the top ten individual scorers in one-day international cricket after

- Australian Adam Gilchrist made 172 against Zimbabwe yesterday: 194 Saeed Anwar Pak v Ind at Chennai, Independence Cup, 1996/97
189 Vivian Richards WI v Eng at Manchester, Texaco Trophy, 1984
189 Sanath Jayasuriya SL v Ind at Sharjah, Champions Trophy, 2000/01
188 Gary Kirsten SA v UAE at Rawalpindi, World Cup, 1996
186 Sachin Tendulkar Ind v NZ at Hyderabad, 2nd ODI, 1999/00
183 Saurav Ganguly Ind v SL at Taunton, World Cup, 1999
181 Vivian Richards WI v SL at Karachi, World Cup, 1987
175 Kapil Dev Ind v Zim at Tunbridge Wells, World Cup, 1983
173 Mark Waugh Aus v WI at Melbourne, Carlton Series, 2000/01
172 Craig Wishart Zim v Nam at Harare, World Cup, 2002
172 Adam Gilchrist Aus v Zim at Hobart, VB Series, 2004
*not out

Agar Khan Gold Cup golf starts

SPORTS REPORTER

The prestigious Agar Khan Gold Cup Golf Tournament began at the lush green and picturesque Kurmitola Golf Course yesterday.

Lt Gen Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, Chief of Army Staff and president of the club, inaugurated the two-day tournament in the morning.

The tee-off was witnessed by Kamaluddin Abdul Aziz, president, His Highness Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Bangladesh, Fatima J Husein, vice-president, His Highness Aga Khan Council, Mubarak Ali, chairman, Aga Khan Foundation and Kyu Hyung Lee, Korean Ambassador in Bangladesh.



Lt Gen Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury (6th from L), Chief of Army Staff and president of Kurmitola Golf Club, poses with the dignitaries after inaugurating the Agar Khan Gold Cup Golf Tournament yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes clues like '38 Monty Python', '42 Mamie's man', '51 Ujalume', etc.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes clues like '11 -eyed (sharp-sighted)', '20 1980 comedy classic', '26 Baby seal', etc.

Ctg lose top spot

FROM PAGE 13

country yesterday:

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Nayan b Rana, Nayan b Nabil, Mustadir c Rana b Nabil, etc.

Salahuddin b Rana 72

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Rajibw Ashiqui, Shaful b Nout, Extras, etc.

Russell 10 0 39 3

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Foizul, Raj, Shaful, Bashir, Nizamuddin, etc.

Murad 2 0 21 0

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Anisur, Nuruzzaman, Rafiqul b Masudur, etc.

6-131, 7-145, 8-164, 9-181, 10-208

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Anisur, Nizamuddin, Shaful, etc.