



Did U Know?

The United States' Major League Soccer made its debut in 1996, shortly after the wildly successful 1994 World Cup was hosted by the United States.



What to WATCH

ESPN
FA Cup
Bolton Wanderers vs Arsenal
Live at 11:35 pm
STAR Sports
Australian Open
Women's Singles Final & Men's Doubles
Final
Live at 8:00 am
FA Cup
Everton vs Chelsea
Live at 8:35 pm



Talk Turkey



Maria Sharapova

(Russian tennis star)
"I'm really excited. I think my shoulder seems to be getting better. That's a big positive. Like I said, without playing a lot of matches to be able to play the quality of tennis that I played today, I think it's a big plus."
After losing to Justine Henin-Hardenne at the Australian Open semifinal.

Clubs say 'no' to BFF

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation's bid to hold a single-leg Premier Football League this year got a blow when the top clubs opposed the idea.

The BFF high-ups sat with the Premier and First Division clubs on Thursday night to discuss the issue but the representatives of 17 clubs present were negative about the idea.

Also, they refused to play the league at the Kamalapur Stadium as well as taking part in two players' transfers for the Premiership and the Professional League in the same season.

The BFF will have to hand over the Bangabandhu National Stadium for renovation of the ground, which will take at least six months. If it wants to launch the Professional League in September, the governing body of football has no other alternative but to stage the Premier League at another venue.

The BFF is expected to take a decision in its executive committee meeting on February 1.

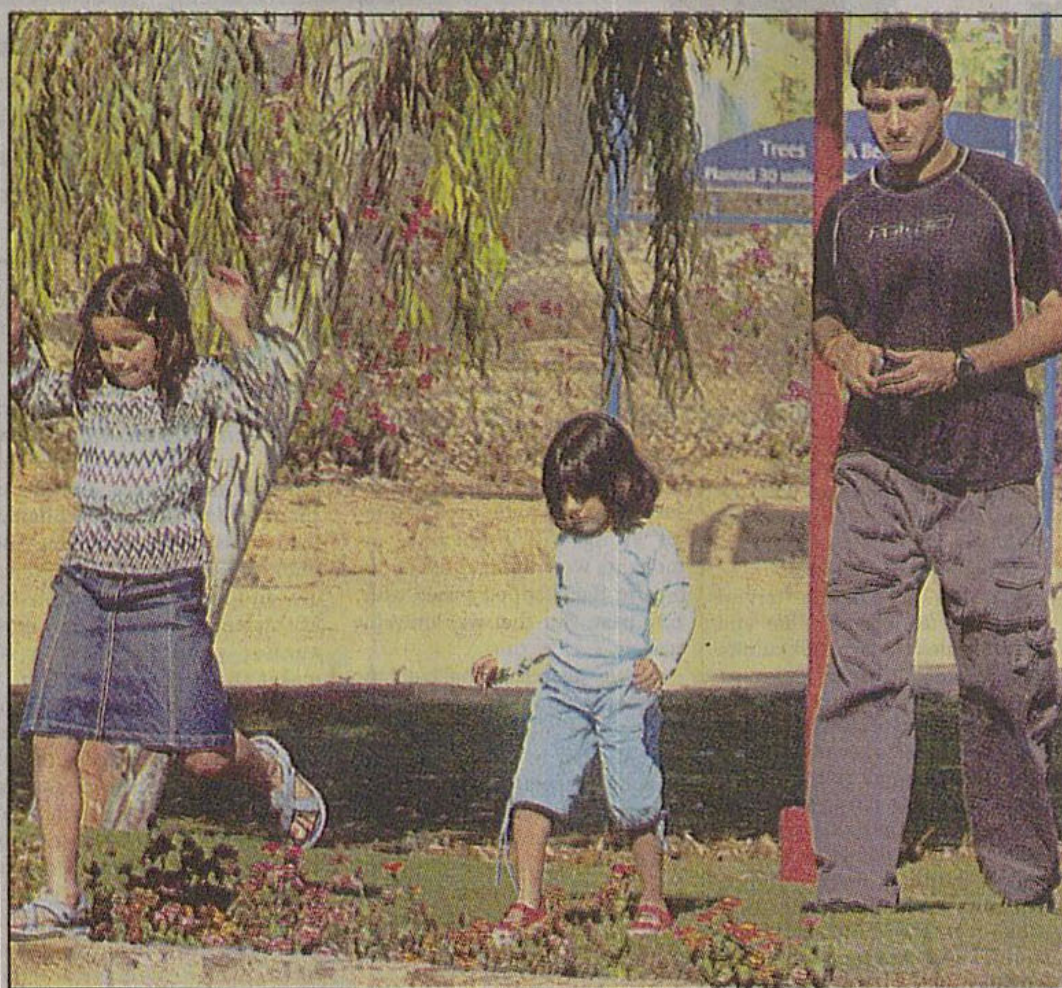
Sino duo lifts doubles crown

AFF, Melbourne

China's Yan Zi and Zheng Jie won the country's first-ever Grand Slam title Friday, grinding down top seeds Lisa Raymond and Samantha Stosur to take the Australian Open women's doubles title. It was a sterling come-from-behind victory by the 12th seeds and the perfect Chinese New Year present for a country considered by many to be the future of tennis.

They had looked out for the count after losing confidence to see the first set slip away in 41 minutes, but regrouped and regained composure to take the second set on a tiebreak, saving two championship points.

The Sichuan natives doggedly held on to win the third set for a memorable 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 victory in 2hr 15mins.



HAVING A PICNIC! Sourav Ganguly, an out of the Indian team, his daughter Sana (C) and Sara (L), daughter of Sachin Tendulkar, strolling at the Arabian Sea Country Club in Karachi on Friday.

Karachi promises a lot

Cricket

AFF, Karachi

The focus has shifted from the players to the pitch as India and Pakistan attempt to salvage their Test series after two high-scoring draws that drew widespread criticism.

The rivals get a chance to break the deadlock in the third and final Test starting at the National Stadium here from Sunday on a hard, greenish wicket that experts say should produce a result.

The bowlers' graveyards in Lahore and Faisalabad made a mockery of the first two Tests which produced 2,791 runs and 12 centuries and saw only 36 of the possible 80 wickets fall.

The stinging criticism of the flat, lifeless wickets from players and fans alike prompted the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to release a statement blaming the cold weather in both cities for the dull

draws.

"Regrettably, due to weather conditions -- rain, frost and absence of sunshine -- the pitches turned out low and slow, tilting the balance totally in favour of batsmen, producing dull cricket and disappointing results," the PCB release said.

"It is hoped that Karachi, which has abundant sunshine, will produce a pitch that will be result-oriented and will strike a fair balance between bat and ball."

Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer said his first look at the National Stadium wicket made him optimistic that a result was possible.

"I am pleased to see the best square of the series two days before the Test starts," said Woolmer, the former England batsman.

"It is a typical Karachi wicket which should have good bounce in the beginning and help spinners later in the game."

The high-profile Test series, touted as bigger than the Ashes contests between England and Australia, needs a fitting finale to

lift the morale of fans on both sides of the border.

When India played in Pakistan in 2004, all three Tests produced results with India winning 2-1. Pakistan's tour of India last year ended 1-1 with one match drawn.

Indian captain Rahul Dravid hoped the dull draws in the current series would not diminish interest in India-Pakistan contests.

"Our cricket is important to many people in the world and it's important that people get to see good cricket -- not only for India and Pakistan but for world cricket," said Dravid.

"We've had some very good series before this one. When we came here in 2004 we had some of the best wickets I've seen and played in my career."

"The last couple of Test matches haven't lived up to the expectations of an India-Pakistan contest and I hope Karachi will do that."

India and Pakistan are confident of fielding full-strength teams for the decider despite injury and

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

Federer makes it thrice Sets up Baghdatis final

Australian Open

AFF, Melbourne

Roger Federer reached his third consecutive Grand Slam final Friday with an easy win over Nicolas Kiefer at the Australian Open, to set up an intriguing clash with new star Marcos Baghdatis. The Swiss world number one, watched by his idol Rod Laver in the arena named after him, was too consistent for the self-destructing 21st seeded German, winning 6-3, 5-7, 6-0, 6-2 in 2hr 40min.

Federer stepped up his game after error-riddled wins over Tommy Haas and Nikolay Davydenko in previous rounds,

and broke Kiefer's serve five times in the last two sets for a convincing win.

The top seed, the first player since Andre Agassi in 1999 to reach three consecutive Grand Slam finals, is looking for his second Australian Open, after beating Russian Marat Safin here in 2004, and his seventh Grand Slam crown.

"I had sort of a strange feeling going into this match. Not a negative one, but just like a big excitement because I knew, I'm so close for another Grand Slam," Federer said.

"We've had many close and tough matches over the years, he's beaten me a few times and happily I've beaten him more times than he's beaten me," he said of Kiefer, the bad boy of the tournament who

has rung up a stack of fines.

"It was good to be pushed so much by Tommy and Nikolay. I don't think I have played too bad up until now. I'm really happy to be back in the finals."

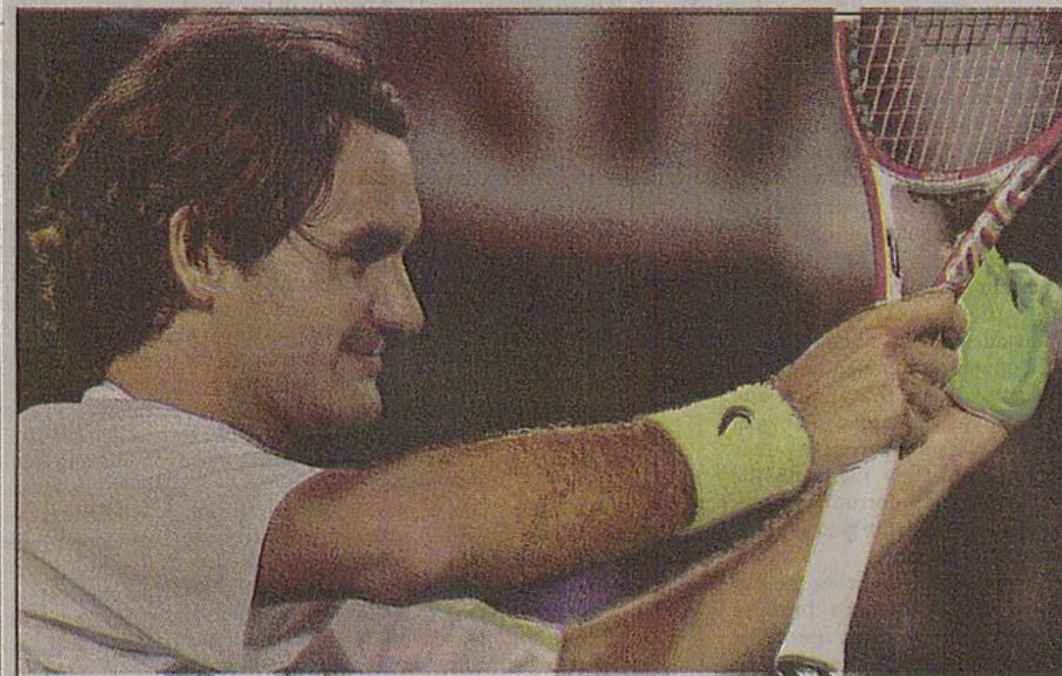
Federer said he was looking forward to playing tournament surprise packet Baghdatis in Sunday's final.

"We're all surprised he has got so far because there's other very talented youngsters who I thought would make the break before him. But he has proved us all wrong," he said.

"He has beaten quality players and he totally deserves to be in the final."

"The thought that I've played him three times and beaten him

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5



Switzerland's Roger Federer acknowledges the crowd after defeating Germany's Nicolas Kiefer in the Australian Open semifinal in Melbourne on Friday.

BD A complete UAE whitewash

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A completed the whitewash of United Arab Emirates cricket team with a five-wicket victory in the back-to-back limited-overs game at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Captain Rajin Saleh, fresh from his side's massive 114-run win on Thursday at the same venue, won the toss for the second successive occasion but preferred to field first in the second match.

The visiting UAE, who had lost the first two games against Bangladesh Under-19 team in Bogra, however, failed to set a challenging total for the start-studded second string Bangladesh squad as they were bundled out for 160 in 49 overs.

Left-arm spinners Abdur Razzak and Mosharraf Hossain picked up two wickets each while four batsmen were run out victims.

Ace paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortuza, who made a return to competitive cricket in Thursday's match after a five-month lay-off

due to back pain, was not included for the second game.

Touring captain and opening batsman Arshad Ali top scored 47 off 112 balls while number nine Mohammad Asad hammered an explosive 25-ball 41 that produced four boundaries and three sixes in the unbeaten knock.

The home team saw a middle-order collapse after a 68-run opening partnership between Rajin (42 off 55 balls) and Shahriar Nafees (35 off 42 balls) but Alok Kapali and Farhad Reza associated in an undefeated 64-run stand for the sixth wicket as Bangladesh A coasted to 163-5 in 36.3 overs.

Out-of-favour Kapali was not out with 28 off 33 balls while Farhad made unbeaten 35 off 41 balls.

SCORES IN BRIEF

UAE: 160 all out in 49 overs (Arshad 47, Sagib Ali 24, Asad 41 not out, extras 9; Shafaq 1-10, Farhad 1-31, Razzak 2-47, Mosharraf 2-14).
BANGLADESH A: 163-5 in 36 overs (Rajin 42, Nafees 35, Tushar 0, Mahmudullah 1, Nadif 11, Kapali 28 not out, Farhad 35 not out, extras 13; Ali Asad 3-35, Shueb 2-54).
Result: Bangladesh A won by five wickets.



TIGERS REAL AND COPIED: Ace Bangladesh spinner Mohammad Rafique shows his eldest son Pinal a clay tiger near the Shishu Academy in the city on way home from a practice session yesterday.

Much-talked BCB meeting today

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite confusions over his invitation, Reazuddin Al Mamun was determined to join the much-talked Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) executive committee meeting to be held at a five-star hotel today in the city.

A lot of burning issues are expected to be discussed at the meeting but all were eagerly waiting how Mamun, who received an invitation despite president Ali Asghar had accepted his resignation, would be treated.

"I have read the general secretary's (Mahbubul Anam) comments where he expressed his ignorance about sending the invitation letter to me. They should have informed me if inviting me was a mistake. The matter is very simple, I got the invitation letter and I will join the meeting," said Mamun, who stepped down as board's joint-secretary more than two months, last night.

"I am ready to face any kind of situation. I just want to say something about my resignation in front of the elected board members in greater interest of the game," he added.

When contacted, BCB president Ali Asghar showed his indifference about the crisis.

"Let's see what happens tomorrow. Our general secretary knows everything about the meeting that's why it is better to ask him," the BCB boss told over telephone from Khulna.

Meanwhile, BCB is going to hold its third meeting, breaching the constitution as they failed to meet the deadline of holding at least one meeting in three months and it could be a big issue today.

The board has yet to form the standing committees as per guidelines of the constitution but it is expected that things would be taken care of today.

Among other agendas, the appointment of a new chief executive officer (CEO) is also expected to be approved in the meeting, which will discuss on the upcoming home series.

Hingis in mixed doubles final

AFF, Melbourne

Martina Hingis continued her impressive comeback Friday by reaching the final of the mixed doubles at the Australian Open.

The Swiss Miss, keen to get as much tennis under her belt as possible, partnered India's Mahesh Bhupathi to a 6-3, 6-3 victory over the fifth seeds, Paul Hanley and Samantha Stosur of Australia.

Hingis and Bhupathi, who are a wildcard entry and not seeded, will play sixth seeds Daniel Nestor of Canada and Russia's Elena Likhovtseva in the final on Sunday.

Hingis, 25, returned this year after a three-year injury layoff and proved she still has what it takes to mix it with the top players, making the Australian Open quarterfinals before crashing to second seed Kim Clijsters

Eng to fight fire with fire Squad named for India tour

Cricket

AFF, London

Monty Panesar was called up Friday to fill the vacant spin berth for England's forthcoming three-Test tour of India.

The uncapped left-armer saw off competition from the likes of Ian Blackwell and Alex Loudon and with Ashley Giles still struggling with the hip injury that forced him to return early from Pakistan, Panesar will have hope to make his Test debut on the spin-friendly Indian pitches.

However, the selectors also announced that Blackwell had been placed on standby in the event that Giles failed to regain fitness.

Left-armer Blackwell has also been named in the England A squad to tour the West Indies as has off-spinner Loudon.

When the selectors named a 15-man squad earlier this month, including left-armer Giles -- England's senior spinner -- and Hampshire off-break veteran Shaun Udal, both of whom were involved in the recent 2-0 series defeat in Pakistan, they kept a place open for a third slow bowler.

Panesar, a 23-year-old England-born Sikh had already put himself in contention by taking 46 wickets for Northamptonshire at a cost of just 21.54 apiece in last season's County Championship.

"Monty has done very well for

Northamptonshire over a period of time and I am sure he will be very excited at the prospect of touring India," said England's chairman of selectors David Graveney in a statement.

England's spin situation worsened Tuesday when it was announced that Giles, a fixture in the Ashes winning team where his lower-order batting and safe gully catching were just as important as

unlikely he will be fit for the start of the tour of India.

"But he will continue with his rehabilitation programme as pain allows and the medical team will continue to monitor his progress closely."

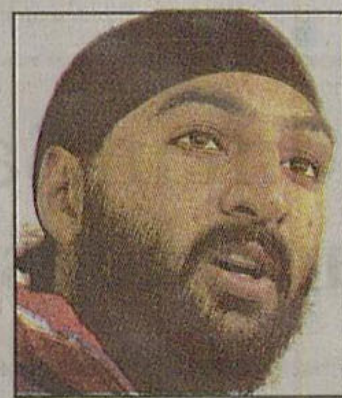
England coach Duncan Fletcher has made no secret of his liking for players who have at least two strings to their bow and Panesar's batting and fielding are not as good as those of Alex Loudon and Blackwell, his main rivals for the third spinner spot.

However, earlier this month, Graveney, himself a former county spin bowler took the unusual step of endorsing Panesar in radio interview and the Northamptonshire bowler's call-up may also have owed something to the presence of former England spinner Geoff Miller on this selection panel.

Panesar himself has been working on his batting at Darren Lehmann's Academy in Adelaide and that could prove time well spent.

England's Test squad leaves for Mumbai on February 12 and the first of three Tests is due to start, in Nagpur, on March 1.

SQUAD
Michael Vaughan (capt), Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Ashley Giles, Stephen Harmison, Matthew Hoggard, Geraint Jones, Simon Jones, Kevin Pietersen, Monty Panesar, Liam Plunkett, Matthew Prior, Andrew Strauss, Marcus Trescothick and Shaun Udal.



MONTY PANESAR

his bowling, was losing his battle to regain fitness following surgery.

"Ian Blackwell has been placed on standby to join the Test squad if Ashley fails to recover from his injury in time prior to the tour," Graveney added.

Commenting on Giles's injury, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief medical officer, Dr Peter Gregory, said: "The medical team's current view is that it is

Jayasuriya boost for Sri Lanka

Cricket

AFF, Perth

Sri Lankan opener Sanath Jayasuriya is expected to resume his place in the team for Sunday's vital triangular series clash with Australia in Perth after recovering from a thigh strain.

The big-hitter was sorely missed on Thursday when Sri Lanka blew their chance to move to the top of the triangular series table after losing to the Australians by five wickets in Adelaide.

But team manager Michael Tissera said Friday that Jayasuriya, one of only four batsmen in the world to make more than 10,000 one-day international runs, would be fit.

"He should be ok. He just had a little bit of a thigh strain but it's fine," Tissera said from Adelaide.

The last time Jayasuriya played the Australians -- in Sydney last Sunday -- he smacked 114 runs off 96 balls to set up a 51-run victory.

Tissera said captain Marvan Atapattu, who hobbled off the Adelaide Oval while fielding on Thursday, should also be available.

"It's a back spasm but nothing serious, we're expecting him to be fit," he said.

Beginning of the end of Tendulkar?

MOIN KHAN

The Faisalabad Test will go down in the annals of history as another run-fest. But as I see the game, I fear this may just be the beginning of the end of Sachin Tendulkar, the man we all respect, adore and love because of his tremendous natural talent and humble attitude.

The more I look back at his dismissal, the more convinced I get that the downhill journey for the little champion has started because it has been established that, according to the laws of the game, he was not out as the ball had made contact with the right glove that was not in play.

What is even more mindblowing is that he did not look at the umpire and immediately started his long walk towards the pavilion. I am not willing to buy the theory that Sachin did not know the laws of the game. If Michael Kasprowicz knows them, then I am sure that after playing for 16 years at the highest level and having led his country for a couple of years, Sachin knows all the rules by heart.

Then what prompted Sachin to leave the pitch on which six centuries and two 90s were scored? Hostile bowling by Shoaib Akhtar, or the tension-filled dressing room atmosphere that often gets on the nerves of the batsmen who start feeling suffocated?

(Former Pakistan cricketer Moin Khan wrote this column for PTI)

SEE PAGE 13 COL 8