

The love affair goes on

AFP, New Delhi

Indian newspapers on Friday showed praise on star batsman Sachin Tendulkar for returning from injury with a sparkling unbeaten 141 against the West Indies in Malaysia.

Tendulkar's 40th one-day century, which gave him a staggering 75 hundreds in international cricket, dominated the sports pages even though the West Indies won the rain-affected match in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday.

It was the 33-year-old's first major game after a shoulder injury kept him out since the third Test against England in Mumbai in March.

"He's back, and how," cried the Indian Express with a picture of Tendulkar with his arms raised. It also carried an appreciative article by former Indian captain Sunil Gavaskar.

Gavaskar wrote that Tendulkar had dispelled all doubts over his fitness with the masterful and entertaining knock.

"Once he hit that front foot down and straight drove the fast bowler, it was clear that he was mentally at peace with himself and had no doubts in his mind about his fitness," Gavaskar wrote.

Popular television pundit Harsha Bhogle, also writing in the Indian Express, cautioned against taking Tendulkar for granted.

"As we celebrate, we need to tuck away at the back of our minds that this will not happen everyday," Bhogle wrote. "Tendulkar is in a reality show, not a scripted Bollywood blockbuster.

"Let us not package him like the movies, just savour him for what he has done and is doing for as long as he can."

The Times of India, under the headline "Hooked on Sachin", gave statistical details of the prolific batsman who holds the world record for most runs (14,289) in one-day cricket and has scored a record 35 hundreds in Tests.

"D/L spoils Tendulkar's KL party", the paper added, referring to the Duckworth and Lewis system that awarded the curtailed match to the West Indies.

Most papers did not fail to note that the West Indian total of 141-2 in 20 overs was the same as Tendulkar's individual score and blamed bad luck for the defeat.

The front page of the Hindustan Times had a picture of Tendulkar under the headline "Batman returns", while The Hindu said, "Sachin scores, but Duckworth and Lewis prevail."

Moratti demands

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among the goals."

Inter's first match of the season away to Fiorentina last week ended in a 3-2 win, but once again they showed their defensive frailties.

The champions, awarded the title after Juventus and AC Milan were found guilty of match-fixing, opened up a 3-0 lead and seemed set to run up a cricket score.

But they relaxed after their blistering start and allowed Fiorentina to score twice late on and nearly snatch a point.

Esteban Cambiasso, who scored twice in Florence, has been ruled out for a month after suffering a calf strain in that match.

Roma, who scored four goals in the last 23 minutes in Tuesday's 4-0 Champions League win over Shakhtar Donetsk, visit Siena.

Roma, likely to be Inter's closest rivals, kicked-off their campaign with a 2-0 victory against Livorno.

AC Milan, who started on minus eight points for their role in the match-fixing scandal, face a potentially tricky match away to Parma.

Fiorentina, firmly rooted to the foot of the table having been deducted 19 points for rigging matches, visit Livorno for the Tuscan derby.

Atalanta, who are top the table after the first round of matches by virtue of their better goals scored record, play away to Sicilian side Catania.

Mixed fortune

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Africa international striker, and former Champions League winner with Porto, Benni McCarthy also found the net.

But a last minute equaliser from substitute Marc Janko salvaged a draw for the Austrians.

Ajax, who won this competition back in 1992, were being pegged at 2-2 on the hour mark in Norway before striding clear with three unanswered goals.

Young Netherlands international striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar scored a brace while there were also scores from Markus Rosenberg, Wesley Sneijder and Garcia Rogier.

Sevilla took a 2-0 half-time lead through Kepa Blanco-Gonzalez and Duda but Atromitos hit back after the break through Giorgos Korakakis to set up a nervy finale.

Former European Cup winners Red Star Belgrade crashed 2-0 at Slovan Liberec while Eintracht Frankfurt cruised to a 3-0 win over Brondby.



PHOTO: AFP

New Zealand goalkeeper Kyle Pontifex (R) challenges England's James Tindall during their Hockey World Cup classification match in Moenchengladbach on Friday.

England down NZ

AFP, Moenchengladbach

England won through to the playoff for fifth and sixth positions at the men's field hockey World Cup Championship with a 4-3 defeat of New Zealand here Friday.

The result of the match between the Netherlands and Pakistan will determine England's playoff opponent.

England played catch-up after New Zealand scored twice in the first-half through two low penalty corner flicks by Hayden Shaw, one deflected in by Ryan Archibald.

In the last minute of the first-half Simon Mantell took a rebound off

Kyle Pontifex' pads from a Ben Hawes penalty corner flick to put England on the scoreboard and back in the match at 2-1 going into the break.

Glenn Kirkham capitalised on a defensive error by Archibald, dispossessed by Richard Alexander who ran to the right through the circle and fired in a shot to score with a diving backstick flick in front of goal for England's equaliser 11 minutes into the second half.

Simon Child drove in backstick shot from the top of the circle for New Zealand to lead 3-2 after 51 minutes but England's equalise came through a second for Mantell, set up again by Alexander's shot from the right.

James Tindall scored England's winner in the last minute from a variation penalty corner.

A win it might have been, but England coach Jason Lee was not too happy.

"This is the worst we have played in this tournament. It seems that England has a record of playing the sixth match of a tournament badly as we did in the European Cup and in the Commonwealth Games loss to Malaysia," Lee said.

New Zealand coach Kevin Towns said he was "extremely disappointed to concede the goals to England. We should have been able to put the game away after leading 2-0.

Svetlana sets Lindsay clash

AFP, Bali

Top seed Svetlana Kuznetsova maintained her perfect record at the Wismilak International when she defeated France's Severine Brémond 6-3, 6-2 on Friday.

The Russian, champion in 2002 and 2004, now stands 11-0 at the tropical resort venue, where she earned her first title a week after lifting the US Open two years ago.

Kuznetsova, the world No. 5, will face American Lindsay Davenport on Saturday in a battle of former Grand Slam champions.

Davenport, the defending champion and former world No. 1, defeated Hana Sromova 6-1, 6-0

in a match where the Czech's unorthodox, no-rhythm game caused her little concern.

"We had some long points and I was working them," said the three-time Grand Slam champion, who will be happy to get some serious competition in the form of Kuznetsova.

"I was able to overpower her. She has no rhythm of pace, but I can't really complain about winning an easy match."

"I felt all the time that I had the match on my racket. At least in the next round I'll be able to rip some balls again."

Kuznetsova said she is keen to take on Davenport after losing three of four to the Californian, the last time in the Australian Open fourth round.

"It will be a high-level match. She's playing well even if she's had a long break (before the US Open) due to injury.

"The key to her game is her serve. If I can move her around and get to the net, I think I have my chances."

Kuznetsova said that a test against a top player is exactly what she wants at the semi-final stage. "She's one of the best in the world, it will be a pleasure to play her."

Swiss second seed Patty Schnyder had another easy outing, defeating Melinda Cízk 6-2, 6-2.

Sixth seed Marion Bartoli kept France in the title race with her defeat of Russian Olga Poutchkova 6-2, 6-4.

Jones pulls out

AFP, Athens

Controversial sprinter Marion Jones has pulled out of this weekend's World Cup here after claiming she was not fit enough to merit her place in the team.

Jones was to be the USA's 100m runner and part of their sprint relay team.

However, she has not raced since revelations surfaced in August that she had failed a drugs test in June.

Although her A sample tested positive for the blood-booster EPO, her B sample tested negative and last week she was cleared of doping.

But the 30-year-old triple Olympic champion is never far from suspicion and her excuse for missing the World Cup will undoubtedly set the rumour mill spinning all over again.

Just before the fourth Golden League meeting in Zurich in August, Jones pulled out citing personal reasons but a leak later revealed it was because she had found out about her positive A sample from the US championships.

Double crowns for Lee, Tanchainant

SPORTS REPORTER

Nutorn Tanchainant of Thailand and Lee Se-won of South Korea won double crowns in the Sagufa ATF Under-14 Tennis Series which concluded in Dhaka yesterday.

Tanchainant found stiff resistance in the first set of the boys' singles final at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday on way to lift the title with a 7-6, 6-2 defeat of Korean Noh Sang-woo.

The Thai player then paired with Ryoto of Japan to clinch the doubles crown beating Indian duo Sumeet and Munshaw 7-6, 6-4.

The Koreans dominated the girls' competition with Lee Se-won beating compatriot Han Na-lae 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 to win the singles crown. The two finalists came from behind to beat Indian pair Agarwal and Rana to bag the doubles title.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman distributed trophies at the concluding ceremony.

All the 32 boys and 21 girls from India, South Korea, Thailand, Japan, Malaysia and hosts Bangladesh will participate in the second-leg of the series, which begins tomorrow at BKSP in Savar.

Lara eyes final

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Getting to the final of the tri-series in Malaysia will be crucial for confidence as the West Indies prepares to defend its Champions Trophy title next month, captain Brian Lara said.

The West Indies have so far won one (against India) and lost one (against Australia) in the DLF Cup, and being in the final on September 24 would be a major boost for a side that has plummeted down the world rankings.

"I think it's very important for us to reach the final here," said 37-year-old Lara, in his third stint as captain.

"We're playing two of the best teams in the world. We are rated much lower than they are and it is important for us morally, for confidence, to get to the final, to beat one of the teams that are here."

The West Indies were comprehensively beaten by Australia in their first match here, losing their last nine wickets for just 29 runs.

But they bounced back and beat India by 29 runs on Thursday on the Duckworth-Lewis method in a rain-hit match.

They play Australia again on Monday and India again on Wednesday.

Lara knows that they must make the most of their opportunities ahead of the Champions Trophy in India, where they must go through qualifying due to their fall down the rankings.

"For us, to win is of the utmost importance with the ICC Champions Trophy just around the corner," he said.

"When we heard about this tournament we wanted to be here because in the first part of the ICC tournament we will be qualifying with the likes of Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, then going into tough opposition.

"So playing India and Australia here first is very important to us and getting to the final and winning it will augur well for us."

Ancic survives a scare

AFP, Beijing

Croatian players suffered a split decision Friday as Mario Ancic survived while top seed Ivan Ljubicic crashed out in the quarter-finals of the China Open.

Ancic, seeded fourth and making his return to tennis this week after a summer swimming injury, hung on against persistent fifth seed Dominik Hrbaty, seeing off the Slovak for a 2-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 victory.

But favourite Ljubicic was upended by eighth-seeded Korean Hyung-taik Lee in a 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) knockout.

The Asian outsider also won the pair's only other match two years ago at the US Open.

The 30-year-old winner came good as he competed in his third quarter-final of the season, moving into a second semi-finals in the Chinese capital.

Lee, standing 60 spots below world No. 3 Ljubicic, established early superiority with a break in the first set which the Croatian could never get back.

Double delight

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partner Russel Kabir Sumon, Parash won the doubles final 21-16, 16-21, 21-13 against Mokhtar Hossain and Mostafa Javed.

Kanika bagged the women's singles title beating Dulali 21-15, 21-13 while Elina and Jinia were doubles winners defeating Chittagong pair Seema and Lima 21-17, 21-15.

Mushy gets coaching job

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Weeks after failing to get a recall on Pakistan's tour of England, leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed has been chosen as the national cricket team's new assistant coach, officials said Friday.

"Mushtaq has been appointed assistant coach for the ICC (International Cricket Council) Champions Trophy. It's only for one tour," Cricket Board spokesman Abbas Zaidi told AFP.

The 36-year-old Mushtaq has been in top form for Sussex in England, having taken 89 wickets for them in the 2006 season, and was widely tipped for a recall during Pakistan's recently concluded Test series in England.

Mushtaq played the most recent of his 52 Tests in 2003. He has 185 Test and 161 one-day wickets.

His latest appointment was apparently at the request of Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq and coach Bob Woolmer, as they want a former player to be groomed as Woolmer's eventual successor.

Woolmer's tenure is set to end after next year's World Cup in the West Indies.

Mushtaq was recalled to the

Pakistan squad for the home series against England last year but did not play in any of the three Tests.

He was instead appointed bowling consultant for the one-day series against England and the subse-



MUSHTAQ AHMED

quent Test series against India.

Pakistan open the eight-team ICC Champions Trophy against a qualifier team at Jaipur in India on October 17. They then take on New Zealand on October 25 and South Africa on October 27, both at Mohali.

Punter asks for reason

Cricket

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Australian captain Ricky Ponting has told Shane Warne to call him and explain after he reportedly launched a stinging attack on national team coach John Buchanan.

The legendary leg-spinner was quoted in British tabloid The Sun as saying Buchanan deserved few plaudits for Australia's world cricket domination, and suggested the team didn't need a coach at all.

"He has been our coach during a successful era but that begs a question -- does the coach make the team or does the team make the coach?" asked Warne, who has had a strained relationship with Buchanan previously.

"I'm a big believer that the coach is something you travel in to get to and from the game!

"You need some sort of team manager more than a coach like we have at Hampshire with Paul Terry, where the captain runs the team and the manager sorts out everything else.

"International players know how to play. You don't need a coach getting too technical. You can forget that you just need to bowl the ball."

Ponting, in Kuala Lumpur for a tri-series with India and the West Indies, said he has been trying to reach Warne for an explanation.

"I've tried to make contact with Shane this morning ... both myself and John have left voice messages on his phone to have a chat with him and try and work out if he actually did say some of the things that were mentioned," he said.

"One thing I do know about last time I spoke with Shane was that he was all about team solidarity and he was looking forward to the team being a very solid group going forward.

Ashes scare for Steve

AFP, London

Steve Harmison's planned return from injury has been put back, increasing England's concerns over the fitness of their leading pace bowler ahead of the Ashes series in Australia later this year.

Harmison, who missed the recent one-day series against Pakistan with back problems, had been due to play for his county, Durham, in their final match of the season at Yorkshire next week.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have decided that Harmison will require further rehabilitation work as they seek to ensure the bowler is fit in time for England's departure for the Champions Trophy in India on October 6.

England officials insisted the move was purely precautionary rather than an indication that Harmison's problems were more serious than initially thought.

"Stephen's withdrawal from this match will allow for a more gradual progression in his recovery programme," said David Graveney, the chairman of the England selectors.

"He will continue to work with the Durham and England medical staff as well as ECB fast-bowling coach Kevin Shine, and we anticipate that he will be fully fit for the ICC Champions Trophy."



PHOTO: AFP

Australia captain Ricky Ponting (R) talks while paceman Glenn McGrath looks on during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur on Friday.

Kim out of Fed Cup final

Tennis

AFP, Charleroi

Belgium will be without Kim Clijsters for this weekend's Fed Cup final against Italy here but they will be able to count on Justine Henin-Hardenne.

Clijsters is still on the sidelines after injuring a wrist prior to the US Open, eventually forcing her to withdraw from the defence of the title she won last year.

Henin-Hardenne reached the final in New York where she lost in straight sets to Maria Sharapova.

The Italians would have started as clear underdogs had both Clijsters and Henin-Hardenne been playing but they now think they have a chance to pull off an upset.

Headed by 14th-ranked Francesca Schiavone and 20th-ranked Flavia Pennetta, the Italians have already beaten on their way to the final defending champions France and Spain.

"We really think we have a good chance of winning," said team captain Corrado Barazzutti.

"Our players know that with Clijsters not available, they can pull off

an upset. They are all very motivated because this is the first time that Italy have reached the final."

Belgian counterpart Carl Maes admitted that the loss of Clijsters would be a heavy blow to his team's chances.

"In any case we have to get by with what we have and in the last two months Kirsten (Flipkens) has gained a lot of experience against players who are higher ranked than herself," he said.

The main burden for the home side however will fall on Henin-Hardenne who will be expected to win both her singles and also contribute in the doubles.

She had looked in top form in New York before being outnited by Sharapova in the final, but admits that she has yet to fully recover from all her efforts in playing seven games in two weeks.

"I could have done with another week's rest and have yet to fully get over my jet lag, but that is part and parcel of a professional player's life," the world No.2 said. "I am ready to do battle."

Not quitting

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"That's what he is capable of and we all know that and even when you are out there in the middle suffering you have to appreciate a genius at work."

Thanks to Tendulkar's efforts, India piled up 309-5 before watching West Indies get off to a flying start to make 141-2 off 20 overs.

Rain and the Duckworth-Lewis rules handed victory to the Caribbean side, who were hammered by Australia in the opening game of the tri-series on Tuesday.

The next challenge for Tendulkar and India comes against the world champion Aussies on Saturday.

Striker crisis

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Walcott his first start, despite impressing as a substitute so far this season, perhaps reflecting his desire to protect his young star in what has traditionally been an explosive fixture.

Togolese international Emmanuel Adebayor is likely to come in, having already scored in the Premiership curtain-raiser against Aston Villa.

Summer signing Julio Baptista may provide an attacking option as a midfielder or a forward, having been a prolific scorer in La Liga during his time with Sevilla and Real Madrid.