

Sourav keen to impress

PTI, Kolkata

Former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly said on Friday he was looking forward to playing in the Challenger Trophy and prove his mettle to the national selectors.

"I don't expect to be in Kolkata during the pujas. I will probably be gone for the Challenger," Ganguly said during a function at his restaurant Sourav's.

"I am now practicing with the Bengal team. I have got runs in the Moin-ud-Dowla Trophy," he said.

"I know I have to score runs consistently, so I am looking forward to playing the Challenger if I get a chance," Ganguly said, adding "I want to use domestic tournaments for making a comeback into the national squad." The squads for the Challenger Series, to be played from October 1 to 4 in Chennai, is to be picked on Sep 26.

Ganguly had skipped the Challenger Series last year citing tennis elbow.

The tournament came close on the heels of his spat with coach Greg Chappell during the tour of Zimbabwe.

Regarding Irfan Pathan, who has hit a bad patch in his career, Ganguly, during whose tenure the pacer was selected to the Indian team, said "ups and downs are part and parcel of every cricketer's life, he is only 21 years old and has a lot of cricket left in him. He will come back again."

Abbas not a witness

CRICINFO, undated

Zaheer Abbas, former Pakistan captain and manager on the recent tour to England, will not be attending the ICC hearing as a witness on charges laid against Inzamamul Haq for ball tampering and bringing the game into disrepute.

Abbas was listed by the PCB as one of their witnesses, as well as Danish Kaneria and Umar Gul, but it was confirmed by the board that neither of the three will be going and written statements will now be sought from the three.

Abbas told APP, "I am not required to appear as a witness in the hearing and according to my information, Gul and Kaneria are not required to attend the hearing in person," said Zaidi.

"Since we are bound to act on the advice of our lawyers whom we have engaged to plead Inzamam's case, we have now been informed that Zaheer, Danish and Umar are not required to attend the hearing in person," said Zaidi.

He added, "In fact, the lawyers have now sought written statements of these three individuals. Now apart from Inzamam, the PCB chairman and Bob Woolmer will be present when the hearing begins next week."

Abbas was replaced by Talat Ali last week for the upcoming Champions Trophy as manager of the Pakistan side. At the time, the PCB explicitly stated that the move was not "any indictment on the capability or ability of Zaheer Abbas as team manager." Instead, it was explained, that because of Abbas's involvement as a witness in the hearings and any possible appeals thereafter "we wouldn't like to put any extra pressure on him" by retaining him as manager.

Europe ahead as Tiger toils

AFP, Straffan, Republic of Ireland

Europe made a storming start to the defence of the Ryder Cup at the K-Club on Friday as Tiger Woods once again struggled early on.

The cup holders were leading the United States early on in two out of the opening quartet of fourballs. The Americans were up in one and level in the other.

Despite Woods' woes he and the steady Jim Furyk reached the turn one up on Colin Montgomerie and Padraig Harrington.

The Americans were also level through six holes in the final anchor match between Phil Mickelson and Chris DiMarco against Darren Clarke and Lee Westwood.

But in-form Paul Casey and Swede Robert Karlsson were two up on Stewart Cink and rookie JJ Henry through eight holes and Spanish duo Sergio Garcia and Jose Maria Olazabal were one up on the hole behind on David Toms and Brett Wetterich.

In the all-important lead-off game the top American pairing took the lead with a birdie from Furyk at the first but Woods in particular looked ragged hitting into a water hazard and his opening drive and missing a couple of shortish putts.

To compile their woes, the group were warned for slow play -- an unusual occurrence in matchplay golf.

But three birdies from Furyk steadied the ship and they were one up at the turn.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard



PHOTO: STAR
IN A TANGLE: Action from yesterday's 14th NZ Textile Mills School Kabaddi final between Dolairpar High School and Rifles High School and College at the NSC gymnasium.

WORLD BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIPS

Shock exit for Hidayat

AFP, Madrid

Defending champion Taufik Hidayat crashed out of the World Badminton championships on Thursday after an extraordinary defeat to Chen Hong, the sixth seed from China.

The unseeded champion from Indonesia led 5-3 in the second game and 17-16 and 18-17 in the third but may have paid the price for lack of match practice in a 14-21, 21-18, 21-19 loss to Chen.

Hidayat, who has spent much of the year on the sidelines, nevertheless looked to be playing well enough to win the match in the first game, in which he took a long early lead and often tied the rallies up cleverly at the net.

This was both a way of avoiding problems with the wind drift and nullified Chen's dangerous jump smash, but Hidayat's concentration appeared to wander in the second game.

This proved a crucial lapse, because although he came back from 11-16 to 16-18 with some more tactical net play, he could not rescue that game, and after that he was always in difficulties against an increasingly motivated opponent.

"In the first game I was too cautious because of the drift," said Chen, a former All-England champion.

"Maybe I was a bit too cautious and I played a bit more cleverly after that."

"I think my confidence was higher than Taufik's."

"In our previous meetings I lost more to him (than I won) but I was not affected by that."

"I had little pressure on me, and Taufik was under more pressure because to win the title he would have had to sweep up four Chinese

players, all at their best."

This sounded like Chen being loyal to his colleagues, because the only stage at which another Chinese player seems likely to stand in Chen's path is in the semifinals on Saturday.

Hidayat slid away into the night and escaped interview on a particularly disappointing day for Indonesia. Earlier Nova Widianto and Lilyana Natsir lost their world mixed doubles title when they were beaten 21-15, 18-21, 22-20 to Koo Kien Kit and Wong Pei Tty of Malaysia.

Chen's success earned him a quarterfinal with Peter Gade, the former world number one from Denmark, who looked in good form as he won 21-14, 21-13 against Shoji Sato, a surprise survivor from Japan.

The winner may well play Lin Dan the brilliant second-seeded former world number one from China who produced an excellent win and a minor controversy afterwards.

Lin triumphed 21-16, 21-12 against Park Sung Hwan, the 13th seed from Korea, and announced that he was feeling good, better than the day before.

But when it came to answering questions about Friday's match against Muhammad Hafiz Hashim from a Malaysian journalist, he asked which country the questioner came from and, on being told, immediately walked out.

Although the sudden exodus annoyed some of the press, the reasons are probably no more sinister than a wish not to give away secrets to his rivals.

The other leading Malaysian, Lee Chong Wei, often played like a top seed during a well-taken 21-16, 21-12 win over Joachim Persson.

He was the third of four Chinese men in the last eight. The fourth is Chen Jin.

Earlier Petra Overzier feared she might be too ill to compete in the world badminton championships but instead produced the biggest surprise of the tournament so far when she reached quarterfinals.

The 24-year-old from Mulheim had been suffering from a virus which made her white in the face and left her on the floor for half an hour after her first match, but she followed it by defeating the fourth-seeded Wang Chen.

Overzier's 22-20, 4-21, 22-20 success was also unusually dramatic. She looked out of it after her second game collapse, and was behind almost the whole way in the final game until she sneaked up on the Hong Kong player right at the end.

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Alonso looks to mount

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"That's why the win against Newcastle on Wednesday was important for us. We were looking to perform solidly back at Anfield, be strong in defence, not concede and create chances and we proved that in that game what we can do."

Spurs have struggled to repeat the fine form which resulted in a fifth-placed finish for Martin Jol's team last season.

Just one victory so far this term, against promoted Sheffield United at White Hart Lane, is all they have to show for their efforts.

However, Jol believes his players can take inspiration from Arsenal's surprise win at Manchester United last week when they face Liverpool.

He said: "No one expected Arsenal to win at Manchester United, but I felt their quality pulled them through. That is what we have to do at Liverpool."

"I feel we have better players and a better defence than ever. We only conceded one goal against United and we kept clean sheets against Slavia Prague and Fulham."

"So now it is up to the imagination of the midfield and forward

players to create possibly a bit more."

"If we can't score a goal out of five chances then we have to make sure we create six, seven or eight chances."

With Liverpool making a slow start to the campaign, Alonso believes that Benitez's squad are just one of many struggling to overcome a World Cup hangover.

He said: "It's been a difficult start, not just for Liverpool's international players, but for all the clubs."

"It's been hard following the World Cup because we've been away for a long time and there hasn't been enough time to work together."

"Maybe FIFA have to consider how much travelling we have to do and the number of games we must play. But of course, you have to cope with this and look after yourself."

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"We knew that at the first false step they would be on us, but we didn't let that bother us," said Mancini's assistant Sinisa Mihajlovic.

Milan have already wiped out their penalty points with three consecutive wins and they will expect to extend their 100 per cent start away to Livorno.

"Obviously we couldn't have done more than we have," said coach Carlo Ancelotti, "But the road is still long and we have a lot of ground to make up."

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Barca wary of 'black beast'

FROM PAGE 20

Xavi is likely to be marked by his sometime Spanish international teammate Valencia's Vicente Rodriguez.

"In one respect it's just one more game but, on the other hand, we are even more determined to beat them since they have become the champions of Europe," said Vicente this week.

Vicente spent large parts of last season on the sidelines with an ankle injury, and unlike Xavi, didn't win his race against time to be fully fit for the World Cup but he has started the season in fine form.

"I'm starting to feel very comfortable back on the pitch again. I'm calmer now but for a long time I was very nervous about how the ankle would stand up. All I want is for people to stop asking me about the ankle, it's always the same question," added a vexed Vicente.

The question for Atletico coach

is expected to continue his policy of rotating his squad which could herald a recall for Belletti and Giovanni Van Bronckhorst at right and left back respectively.

Sevilla, the only other team with three wins from three games and who lead the league having scored more goals than their two immediate rivals, have an away trip to Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

"Atletico still haven't started to play as well as they can at home and we hope to exploit that," explained Sevilla winger Antonio Puerta.

Puerta was alluding to the fact that Atletico have already proved their ability to delight and frustrate in equal quantities, a factor in their failure to qualify for Europe in recent seasons.

However, they showed their positive attributes in an outstanding 4-1 win at struggling Athletic Bilbao last weekend.

The question for Atletico coach

Javier Aguirre is, will he dare to keep his iconic Spanish international striker Fernando Torres on the bench?

Torres was suspended for last week's trip to the Basque country but, in his absence, the pairing of Kun Aguero and Mista Ferrer worked very well against Athletic.

Another man who is unaccustomed to sitting on the bench is Real Madrid's David Beckham but the former England captain could be among the substitutes again when the Spanish giants play at Real Betis on Saturday.

Beckham scored a spectacular injury time goal against Real Sociedad last weekend but new signing Jose Antonio Reyes looks set to retain his starting place on the right wing, a position which Beckham once called his own.

Tendulkar wicket the key: Lee

PTI, Kuala Lumpur

Brett Lee said Australia's game plan on Friday was centred on getting "King" Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag out cheaply and was happy that he accomplished it for his team.

"We had to win this game. It is always nice to get the king (Sachin) out. They (Sachin and Sehwag) are the keys to get first up," Lee said after Australia's 18-run victory in the cricket tri-series at the Kinrara Oval.

Chasing a modest target of 214, India were bundled out for 195 in 43.1 overs with Lee returning 5-38.

The win put Australia through to the final on Sunday against the West Indies.

"It was quite a hot day so bowling second was better. It is hard work in this heat but the ball swings more," Lee said on his spell.

Indian skipper Rahul Dravid said the team's batting left a lot to be desired after its third successive failure in as many matches.

"It is very disappointing to lose and not to reach the final. 213 was a gettable target. It was a very poor batting performance," he said.

"In batting we have not played to our potential. Our top order did not have a good tournament. We need to improve and get better."

Lawson linked with Maharashtra

AFP, New Delhi

West Indies fast bowler Jerome Lawson is set to represent western Indian state Maharashtra in domestic cricket this season.

"I am supposed to come there for the season. We have not signed anything, but hopefully very soon we should be finalising things," the Times of India quoted the paceman as saying on Friday.

The 24-year-old Jamaican was in India last week to meet Maharashtra Cricket Association officials.

Lawson, twice reported for a suspect bowling action, has not played a Test since appearing against Australia in Brisbane in November 2005.

He was in India recently to work on his action at a leading pace academy in Chennai with coaches T. A. Sekar and Dennis Lillee, the former Australian fast bowling great.

In his career, Lawson has