



PHOTO: AFP

Indian tennis star Sania Mirza hits a forehand during her match against Sanja Ancic of Croatia in their women's singles tie at the 19th Hopman Cup held in Perth on Wednesday.

Czechs too good for Spaniards



AFP, Perth

The Czech Republic kept its Hopman Cup hopes alive with an upset win over Spain in their Group B tie at the mixed teams tournament here Wednesday.

The Czech pairing of Lucie Safarova and boyfriend Tomas Berdych came into the tournament ranked third, but were surprisingly beaten by rank outsiders India in their opening round robin clash.

Up against the second seeded pairing of Annabel Medina Garrigues and Tommy Robredo on Wednesday, the Czechs rebounded strongly to notch a 2-1 victory that kept them in the hunt for Friday's final.

Safarova gave her team a perfect start with a gritty three-set win over the higher ranked Medina

Garrigues.

The richly talented Berdych then sealed the victory with a comprehensive straight sets win over Robredo.

In the mixed doubles, Spain gained some consolation with a straight sets win, 7-5 6-2.

Despite losing the tie, Spain can still reach the final after beating Croatia in their opening tie.

In the women's singles, the 42nd-ranked Safarova recovered from a set down to beat the 23rd-ranked Medina Garrigues, 4-6 6-4 6-4.

Unforced errors harmed Safarova in the first set, but she maintained the pressure on her opponent, finally breaking in the 10th game of the second set to level the match.

The deciding third set went for almost an hour, but Safarova produced her best tennis when it counted to claim her first win in

three meetings with the Spaniard.

"It was great for me," Safarova said.

"I lost the first two times that I have played her, so I really wanted to win one.

"I'm really happy I did so well."

Safarova was beaten by India's Sania Mirza in her first singles match and admitted she again struggled early against Medina Garrigues.

"I felt much more comfortable today," she said.

"In the beginning I didn't play so well and then I improved and hit some good shots."

Safarova said the match practice on the Rebound Ace surface would hold her in good stead for the Australian Open, starting on January 15.

Robredo, a previous Hopman Cup winner, was an impressive winner over fellow top 10 player Mario Ancic on Monday, but had no

answer to the power of an in-form Berdych, who made it two wins from two singles matches here.

Ranked six places below his Spanish opponent at 13, Berdych prevailed in a slugging first set and then blitzed Robredo in the second, winning 7-5 6-1.

Berdych was pleased to post such a comfortable victory against a player of Robredo's calibre.

"I expected the same, Tommy is a top 10 player," he said.

"I think that the first set was tough.

"We started the first game and it was so long and I thought that if the whole match was going to be like the first game we were going to be here until midnight.

"At the end of the first set I made some good shots and I won the first set. "After that something changed and I started playing really well."

5-0 stays reality

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off Anderson to wicketkeeper Chris Read.

Hayden chased after a wide Harmison delivery and bottom-edged to Paul Collingwood at second slip, leaving the home side 100 for two.

Earlier, England had lost their last six wickets for 57 off 18 overs to be dismissed for 291 shortly before lunch.

Skipper Andrew Flintoff fought a lone vigil for 89 as the England tail crumbled around him after the side resumed at 234 for four.

It was Flintoff's best return of an undistinguished batting series, coming in 195 minutes and including 11 boundaries and a six.

Australia's pacemen Brett Lee (3-75), McGrath (3-67) and Stuart Clark (3-62) shared nine wickets, with leg-spinner Shane Warne (1-69) claiming the last scalp of Monty Panesar for a duck.

The skids were put under England inside the first hour, when they lost three wickets for just 13 runs in three overs.

Lee claimed two wickets in two balls and McGrath, playing in his 124th and last Test match, captured his third wicket of the innings.

Collingwood was put down by Langer at third slip off Lee when he was on his overnight score of 25.

Then, on 27, Collingwood was squared up by McGrath and gave an outside edge to Adam Gilchrist to expose the brittle English tail.

Read survived a confident leg before wicket appeal before he was

Deco fancies

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(through to 2010). You can't really anticipate what will happen in the coming months or years."

Deco added: "I would like to play in England one day, because it is a league that fascinates me. But I am currently playing for one of the best clubs in the world and I'm happy at present."

Red hot

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until the 76th minute to arrive when Henry was brought down by Souleymane Diawara.

Henry handed the spot-kick duties to van Persie and the Dutchman smashed his shot past Carson.

Van Persie wasn't finished yet and he completed the rout in the last minute with a superb chip over Carson.

out next ball to Lee for two, giving Gilchrist his fourth catch.

Sajid Mahmood was out next ball, popping an easy catch off the shoulder of the bat to Hayden in the gully to put Lee on a hat-trick.

But Lee's hat-trick attempt was wide of off-stump, not obliging Harmison to play a shot.

Harmison lasted 24 balls before he was lbw to Clark for two and Flintoff's second half-century of the series ended when he played extravagantly outside off-stump and was caught by Gilchrist, his fifth catch, off Clark.

Panesar, who was also dropped by the butter-fingered Langer, became Warne's only wicket of the innings in his farewell Test match when he was lbw attempting to sweep, terminating England's innings.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at the close of the second

day of the fifth and final Ashes Test between Australia and England at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday:

ENGLAND: First innings (234 for 4 overnight)
Strauss c Gilchrist b Lee 29
Cook c Gilchrist b Clark 20
Bell b McGrath 71

Pietersen c Hussey b McGrath 41
Collingwood c Gilchrist b McGrath 27
Flintoff c Gilchrist b Clark 89
Read c Gilchrist b Lee 2
Mahmood c Hayden b Lee 0

Harmison lbw b Clark 2
Panesar lbw b Warne 0
Anderson not out 0

Extras: (lb-5, w-3, nb-2) 10
Total: (All out in 103.4 overs) 291

Fall of wickets: 1-45, 2-58, 3-166, 4-167, 5-245, 6-258, 7-258, 8-282, 9-291, 10-291

Bowler	O	M	R	W
McGrath	29	8	67	3
Lee	22	5	75	3

Clark	24	6	62	3
Warne	22.4	1	69	1
Symonds	6	2	13	0

AUSTRALIA: First innings
Langer c Read b Anderson 26
Hayden c Collingwood b Harmison 33
Ponting run out (Anderson) 45

Hussey not out 37
Clarke c Read b Harmison 11
Symonds not out 22
Extras: (lb-8, w-4, nb-2) 14

Total: (For 4 wickets in 55 overs) 188
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-100, 3-118, 4-155

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Flintoff	6	0	31	0
Anderson	17	7	55	1
Harmison	16	5	34	2
Mahmood	4	1	15	0
Panesar	12	0	45	0

Toss: England
Umpires: Aleem Dar (PAK), Billy Bowden (NZL)
Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)

Kiwis limp to victory

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"But Peter Fulton and James Franklin again showed some pretty cool heads."

Sri Lankan skipper Mahela Jayawardene said his side came close to winning, despite the woeful batting performance.

"We knew we didn't deserve to win this game, purely because of the way we batted in the morning," he added.

New Zealand's victory gives the home side a 2-1 lead with two matches left to play in the five game series.

The damp conditions favoured the bowlers and for Sri Lanka, master spinner Muttiah Muralidaran was always a threat, taking 1-18 from his nine overs.

Ruchira Perera, with 2-37 from five overs, and Dilhara Fernando's 2-34 from 6.3 overs took valuable wickets, but also gave away too many runs given the low target set for New Zealand.

Sri Lanka's batsmen never seemed at ease and the tourists were unable to gain momentum amid the rapid fall of wickets.

Poor shot choices were behind the loss of many of Sri Lanka's wickets as showers periodically interrupted play.

New Zealand's Michael Mason was a hero with the bat in the second one-dayer on Sunday when he hit the winning four runs off the last ball to level the series.

On Tuesday, he shone with the ball, finishing with the

best figures of 4-24 off nine overs in a tight spell.

Left arm spinner Vettori proved typically tightfisted with runs, ending with 2-7 off his 5.2 overs.

Wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum played brilliantly behind the stumps with three excellent catches and he helped James Marshall complete a deft run out.

Sri Lanka was staggering at 61-5 by the 16th over and they could manage only another 51 runs for the remaining five wickets.

New Zealand's sharp fielding performance maintained the pressure on Sri Lanka with Marshall and Vettori instrumental in two excellent run outs.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the third one-day international between New Zealand and Sri Lanka played at Jade Stadium on Tuesday:

(Under the rules for rain-shortened matches, New Zealand's target for victory was reduced to 110 within 46 overs)

SRI LANKA
Tharanga c McCullum b Mason 11
Jayasuriya c McCullum b Bond 0
Atapattu c Taylor b Mason 28
Sangakkara c Taylor b Mason 15
M Jayawardene run out (Vettori) 1

Silva c and b Mason 4
Dilshan run out (J. Marshall) 18
Maharoor c McCullum b Vettori 13
Fernando not out 8

Muralitharan c Taylor b Franklin 8
Perera c Franklin b Vettori 0
Extras: (w-2, nb-4) 6

Total: (All out in 35.2 overs) 112

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-32, 3-50, 4-55, 5-61, 6-68, 7-92, 8-99, 9-112 10-112.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mason	9	1	24	4
Bond	8	1	37	1
Franklin	7	1	32	1
Gillespie	6	3	12	0
Vettori	5.2	2	7	2

NEW ZEALAND
McCullum c Silva b Perera 22
Astle b Maharoor 0
Taylor c Dilshan b Perera 0

Fulton not out 43
Vettori c Sangakkara b Fernando 11
J Marshall c Dilshan b Muralidaran 5
H Marshall b Fernando 4

Franklin not out 15
Extras: (b-1, lb-7, w-2) 10
Total: (For 6 wickets in 24.3 overs) 110

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-8, 3-27, 4-51, 5-65, 6-70

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Maharoor	4	1	13	1
Perera	5	0	37	2
Muralidaran	9	2	18	1
Fernando	6.3	0	34	2

Result: New Zealand won by four wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Michael Mason.

Toss: New Zealand
Umpires: Steve Davis (AUS), Tony Hill (NZL)

Television umpire: Gary Baxter (NZL)

Afghans rout Brit forces

AFP, London

England "getting clobbered" in Australia might be understandable, but there will be no special mentions in dispatches for those Royal Marines in Afghanistan who were likewise stuffed by the locals at cricket.

While Australia are the world champions in that most English of sports, Afghanistan is hardly a name that likewise sends shivers up the spine in cricketing circles.

Nonetheless, the British servicemen were trounced by an Afghan National Army team on a helicopter landing strip substituting for a pitch in a festive match Sunday to mark Christmas, New Year and the Muslim festival of Eid.

Members of 45 Commando Group were dismissed for 56 all out and not a single player made a double figure score.

If the British batting was poor, the bowling was no better, as the Afghan side cruised to victory within 12 overs for the loss of two wickets.

Lieutenant Rob Cooper told Britain's domestic Press Association news agency that the Marines were no match for their local counterparts.

"The skill level of the Afghans was brilliant. We soon realised that we were in trouble when they opened the bowling," he said.

"Obviously we were disappointed to lose as badly as we did, but we still managed to enjoy the encounter.

"It certainly provided a good break from the operational work being done on a daily basis out here."

The Marines and Commando Gunners have been training the Afghan Army's 3/205 Brigade for the last three months.

But now it seems like they could do with some training themselves to sort out their batting and bowling.

Britain has deployed around 5,600 service personnel to Afghanistan in total, with around 4,300 of those in the south of the country and 1,300 in the capital, Kabul.

Morgan, Pawar

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before announcing its recommendation to the next executive board meeting in March. Voting will then take place at the annual conference which, this year, is being held in London; the successful candidate must secure support from two-thirds of the members.

"This is the first time this method of selecting the ICC president has been employed," said Dr Muttiah, chairman of the ICC nominations committee. "It is a fair and transparent process and one that we believe will ensure the most suitable candidate gets the job."

Crouch

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with the forward believed to be frustrated by Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez's controversial squad rotation system.

However, Crouch added: "I have had challenges throughout my career and this is another one. There are a lot of players who get rotated and I am not the only one."

"When you get a chance, you've got to take it. Hopefully I've given the manager something to think about. We all need to impress, not just those who are in and out.

"It can get frustrating when you want to play every game and do your best for the club, but all you can do is keep working hard.

"I know the manager has got no problem with me. Everyone who knows me knows my attitude won't change. I've always worked hard and given my all, and that's always going to be the case."

Emre in racism

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However, he mentioned he had been informed of the claims in his report, which was received by the Football Association on Tuesday and the national governing body are now set to pursue the matter.

"We have received the referee's report and he mentions that an allegation was made, but he did not hear anything himself," said an FA spokesman.

"We will be writing to Everton to request any further information with which they can provide us."

Emre clashed angrily with the Everton pair after the duo had been awarded a penalty and the subsequent disruption caused a lengthy break in the game as players from both sides tried to intervene.

Gallagher took no action other than to speak to the former Inter Milan player after consulting his assistant.

Both Newcastle manager Glenn Roeder and Everton counterpart David Moyes were able to add any details regarding the alleged incident with the players involved in the flare-up remained tight-lipped.

However, there were reports home fans behind the goal where the incident occurred were planning to write to the FA, and the spokesman added: "If we receive any evidence from players or supporters, we will treat it very seriously."

Emre must now wait to see if Everton will make a complaint against him with a fine or a ban awaiting him if he is charged and convicted.

He played in Newcastle's 2-2 draw with Manchester United on Monday and is set to play a key role for Roeder's men in their FA Cup third round match away to Championship leaders Birmingham on Saturday with skipper Scott Parker suspended and Nicky Butt struggling to overcome an ankle problem.

No fear about Freddie



CRICINFO, undated

On a day when England needed to be firing on all cylinders to prevent Australia taking control of the fifth and final Test, Andrew Flintoff's contribution with the ball was a cause of concern.

Despite taking the new ball, he bowled just six overs in the day in two three-over spells – one of which was interrupted by lunch – to raise further fears about his troublesome left ankle.

England nevertheless insisted that all was well. "His ankle is fine," said England's leading bowler of the day, Steve Harmison, whose sentiments were simultaneously expressed by the England press officer sat beside him. "It was just that myself and Jimmy were bowling well and the rain break came at a good time for us."

Even so, Flintoff's absence from the front line of the attack was a puzzlement – especially on a day when England were lacking the services of their most consistent performer of the tour, Matthew Hoggard, who failed a fitness test

before the start of the match.

"When you lose your best bowler of the series it's up to the other bowlers to step up a little bit and hopefully that's what we've tried to do," added Harmison. "Jimmy bowled well. Monty bowled well and I felt I got better as the day wore on. It's nicely poised, and it's a good time to have a break and recharge the batteries and come back tomorrow."

Glenn McGrath is another man who knows about bowling through the pain of a sore ankle, having undergone similar surgery to remove a bone spur in October 2003. "I'm not sure how Freddie's going at the moment," he said. "I know I felt great until I snapped one of the other spurs off."

"But bowling's a funny thing, and it's amazing how much pain you can bowl with. It's only in between the overs that you really feel it. I'm sure Freddie will keep going, and keep hitting the deck."

It was a day of disappointments for Flintoff, after earlier falling short of his second century against Australia. "He was batting well and we're all disappointed for him," said Harmison. "Australia bowled in good areas and didn't give us much to hit, and they tried to starve him of the

strike as much as they possibly could. Perhaps we (the tail) could have got a few more and helped Andrew get us up to 300 or nearer 350.

As to Flintoff's general moral, as a gruelling series draws to a close, Harmison said: "I don't think he's taken it any more personally than the rest of us do. We're all disappointed, despondent and devastated. At the end of the last Test that dressing-room was horrendous, it was not a very nice place to be. But you have to put a brave face on and you have to show a bit of fight. I think Fred took it on the chin a bit more than anyone else as captain. But he's trying his best and we're all trying to win this Test match for England."

Subject to fitness, Michael Vaughan is waiting in the wings to take over for the one-day series, but Harmison was adamant that his friend was not keen to hand over the reins. "I think Fred will be very disappointed if he's not captain for the one-dayers, if that's what happens."

"He just loves captaining England. There is no better job in Andrew Flintoff's eyes than being captain of England, but if that happens it happens. I'm sure he'll fall into line – as he would if Andrew Strauss had been named captain for this series."

Harmy stands up



AFP, Sydney

Steve Harmison gave a glimpse of what might have been Wednesday with a zestful bowling performance to give England hope of preventing a 5-0 Ashes series whitewash to Australia in the final Test.

The Durham giant has been one of the tourists' biggest disappointments in the series with just eight wickets in the four Test defeats heading to the final Sydney Test after his 17-wicket haul in the 2005 Ashes series.

Harmison bowled with bounce and accuracy to remove Matthew Hayden (33) and Michael Clarke (11) as Australia recovered to 188 for four at second day stumps in reply to England's 291.

Harmison was given an extended run by skipper Andrew Flintoff, sending down 16 overs for 2-34.

He began the series with a spectacular wide on his opening delivery in the first Gabba Test to set the tone for his misfiring series, but he looked more like his old self Wednesday, although he said he still experienced rhythm difficulties.

"I didn't feel like I had any rhythm at all," he admitted.

"It was a matter of being patient and putting the ball in good areas. I got

two wickets.

"I didn't bowl at 90 miles an hour, like I can bowl, the speed was down but at the end of the day it was just a little bit of rhythm that was off.

"Today it wasn't as fluent, but I feel more confident that it didn't come out great and I still got two wickets."

Harmison, who has been relegated to first-change bowler after the shambles in Brisbane, said he had been frustrated by his Ashes performance, but said it was not because of a lack of effort.

"It is frustrating and I'm sure it's frustrating for everybody watching," he said.

"But at the end of the day I've tried my hardest, I've tried my best."