



PHOTO: AFP

Croat and Serb fans clash in the grounds of Melbourne Park during the first day of action at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Monday.

Fighting mars opening day



AFP, Melbourne

Police ejected about 150 spectators from the Australian Open Monday after an ugly brawl broke out between Serbian and Croatian fans inside the ground.

Wearing the national colours of the bitter Balkan rivals, they clashed in the Rod Laver Arena after taunting and hurling insults at each other.

Witnesses said they kicked and punched each other, setting upon their rivals with flagpoles, bottles and chairs before dozens of police and security staff ended the melee then ejected the combatants after confiscating their tickets.

"They were mostly Serbians ejected as they were upsetting the Croations," Victoria state police spokeswoman Katherine Jess said.

Earlier, a group of Croatian fans gathered in central Melbourne and lit flares as they made their way to the stadium.

"It's bad because you go to the tennis and you go to watch and then it ends up in an actual brawl, it's just ridiculous," a Croatian fan called Marina told Australian Associated Press.

But a Serbian fan claimed: "The Croats started kicking and punching us. It's unfair they get to stay and we have to go."

Tournament organisers described the scenes as unprecedented. While Australian tennis crowds at events such as Davis Cup can be fiercely partisan, their passion has never previously generated violence.

Tennis Australia chief executive Steve Wood said there were no arrests or reports of injuries and noted security staff acted swiftly to end the fight.

He said fans in national colours had always been a welcome feature of the season-opening Grand Slam but organisers would not let troublemakers ruin it for others.

"We hope that today's well coordinated response sends a clear message that while we are happy for fans to come along and support their favourite player,

decisive action will be taken if any patrons, or groups, cross the line of acceptable behaviour at this family event," he said.

The Serbian fans had gathered to support in-form youngster Jelena Jankovic, while the Croats were at the tournament for matches involving Mario Ancic, Karolina Sprem and Ivan Ljubicic.

Ancic said he knew nothing about the disturbance, which occurred as he was cruising to a straight sets victory over Japan's Go Soeda.

"No, I had no idea," he said, before defending Croatian fans.

"We are well known for great support but correct support. I don't know (of) any excess ever."

There is likely to be a heavy security presence at Tuesday's match between Serbian Ilija Bozoljovic and Croatian Marin Cilic, a potential flashpoint.

Serbian supporters were criticised at last week's Sydney International final when they booed Belgian Kim Clijsters during her win over Jankovic and chanted during her victory speech.

Jankovic called for calm, saying

"it's just a sport and people should just come and enjoy the game".

She said she had never experienced similar clashes elsewhere.

"(It's) just here in Melbourne that there is this kind of problem -- anywhere else in the world it's fine," she said.

Melbourne has large Croatian and Serbian populations and rivalries between the communities have previously spilled into violence at football matches.

Community leaders condemned the brawling but blamed each other. "National pride is one thing but this is unacceptable," Croatian Community Association secretary Tom Starcevic said.

"I wasn't there but from what I've seen and heard the Serbs were quite provocative."

Serbian Cultural Club president, Toma Banjanin, said Croatian supporters provoked Serbian fans by flaunting their colours.

"You didn't see many Serbs dressed that way," Banjanin said. "I think Croats are always overdoing things, they are always mixing politics with sport."

Yousuf joins teammates

REUTERS, Karachi

Record breaking Pakistani batsman Mohammad Yousuf has left the country to join his teammates ahead of the second Test against South Africa later this week, a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official told Reuters on Monday.

"He has left for Johannesburg and will be available for the reminder of the series," PCB director of cricket operations Saleem Altaf said.

Yousuf, who scored a record breaking 1,788 runs including nine centuries in 2006, missed the ongoing first Test at Centurion due to the impending birth of his third child.

The player's wife gave birth to a baby girl last week allowing Yousuf to make himself available, Altaf added.

The second Test of the three-match series starts on January 19 in Port Elizabeth.

PCB surprised

PTI, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has been taken in by "surprise" by the announcement for matches involving Mario Ancic, Karolina Sprem and Ivan Ljubicic.

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Crucial game: Vaughan

BBC Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

England captain Michael Vaughan says the clash with New Zealand will be crucial to their one-day campaign.

Both teams lost opening matches against hosts Australia and appear to be fighting for the second spot in the Commonwealth Bank Series finals.

"It is a big game because obviously one of us will be in the final," said Vaughan as he prepared in Hobart.

"New Zealand have got a few injuries and like us are hoping to get all their players back for the World Cup."

The match, England's only fixture in the series that will not finish under floodlights, begins at 2300 GMT on Monday.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming is well aware that England could take their Ashes frustration out on his side.

"England will be dangerous because they are wounded. They will be pouring so much into this game but this is our chance to keep them down," he said.

"This match will be important in terms of momentum for the rest of the series.

"They've beaten us 5-0 in one-day series and that's pretty demoralising. So I know exactly how Michael Vaughan and Andrew Flintoff are feeling.

"We got out of that rut by playing another team. You get away from Australia, take a deep breath and put into practice what you've learned."

England do not have to face the hosts again until next Friday in the tournament, which pits each side against the others four times before the best-of-three finals series.

Fast bowler Shane Bond, who took a hat-trick against Australia on Sunday, pinpointed the Black Caps' batting as their weak point at the moment.

"We've struggled with the bat mainly. It hasn't quite clicked into gear for us. We've tried a couple of combinations and things haven't quite worked," he told BBC Radio Five Live.

"We've got the talent in our squad. It's just a matter of getting into gear and I'm sure that will happen some time in this tournament."

England should take advantage

of a weakened New Zealand side now because all-rounders Jacob Oram and Scott Styris are expected back from injury in time for the next meeting between the two sides, in Adelaide on January 23.

Young batsman Ross Taylor has been declared fit despite suffering cramp during his sparkling 84 against Australia on Sunday.

Ed Joyce is set to play in the England middle order for the first time after Kevin Pietersen was ruled out with a fractured rib. Squad replacement Ravi Bopara will join the squad in Brisbane later in the week.

TEAMS

ENGLAND (from): Michael Vaughan (captain), Andrew Strauss, Ian Bell, Andrew Flintoff, Paul Collingwood, James Dalrymple, Paul Nixon, James Anderson, Jon Lewis, Monty Panesar, Chris Tremlett, Ed Joyce, Sajid Mahmood, Liam Plunkett, Chris Read.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Andre Adams, Nathan Astle, Shane Bond, James Franklin, Peter Fulton, Mark Gillespie, Brendon McCullum, Craig McMillan, Hamish Marshall, Michael Mason, Jeetan Patel, Ross Taylor, Daniel Vettori.

CA seeks one more Test

BBC Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

A sixth Ashes Test could be played in the 2010-2011 series between Australia and England following the spectacular success of the recent series, Cricket Australia (CA) said Monday.

A sixth Test could be played in Hobart city on the southern island of Tasmania when Australia next host the series, a spokesman for the sport's governing body here said.

A host of attendance records were broken during the recent series, despite the Australians winning 5-0 in a one-sided contest to regain the Ashes.

The large crowds built on the incredible interest in the oldest rivalry in cricket generated by the 2005 series which England won at home.

"Cricket Australia is keen in principal to have six Test matches the next time we have an Ashes series in four years," CA public affairs manager Peter Young said.

"If we do have six it gives us the ability to schedule an Ashes Test match in Hobart," he said.

"That's our ambition ... we want

to be able to take Test cricket to as many people in Australia as possible.

The Ashes, which dates back to 1882, is traditionally a five-Test series although four and six Tests have been played, the most recently in 1997.

Since cricket is a summer game, and the venues in England and Australia are in opposite hemispheres, the break between series is alternately 18 months and 30 months.

Hobart's Bellerive Oval, the home ground of Australia captain Ricky Ponting, is the only major domestic cricket venue in Australia that does not host an Ashes Test.

Although Young conceded the busy international schedule made extending the series difficult, he was hopeful of an agreement with the England and Wales Cricket Board on the change.

"The ECB are aware of our ambition, but discussions are a long way off being finalised," he said.

However, England coach Duncan Fletcher warned that his players were already struggling to cope with a particularly heavy international workload.

Fletcher stressed that he hadn't discussed the matter with the ECB, who are preparing to review their

side's dismal Ashes showing, but said his players needed breaks in their schedule.

"To introduce more cricket is just going to complicate the issue because we play these long Test (series) -- five against Australia, four against the West Indies, five against South Africa -- whereas most sides are playing against each other in three Tests, so they can have a break," he said.

"We struggle to get these breaks."

Serena's dress

FROM PAGE 20

Fashion icon Maria Sharapova is due to unveil her latest creation for the season-opening Grand Slam on Tuesday after wearing a powder-blue dress last year that resembled a baby-doll nightie.

At the 2002 US Open Williams sported a now infamous black lycra catsuit, while at the Australian Open in 2005 she unveiled a lime-green and white costume that included knee-high spaceboots with a detachable leg section that could be removed before play commenced.

Last year she confined herself to a mint-green pleated skirt and regulation-issue tanktop.

Totti, Mancini

FROM PAGE 20

Inter Milan.

It became apparent that there was a problem in last week's Italian Cup match against Parma when they both scored but chose not to join in with each other's celebrations.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti explained how the pair fell out.

"A year and a half ago there was a row between the two of them and it continued in the dressing room," he said.

"At the time I didn't feel it was necessary to intervene, but then I saw that things between them were no better and I spoke to them."

"Both of them told me there was no problem, but I knew there was still some ill-feeling."

"I have great respect for them and on the pitch they were playing well together, so I let it go."

"Even the rest of the squad joked about it. It wasn't anything serious."

Jittery passage

FROM PAGE 20

Germany's Rainer Schuettler, and said it was unsettling being back at the scene of his career tennis highlight.

"It's not like a normal tournament for me, and that's all. It's like a different tournament and I'm not used to it. I have to just find my way," he said.

Mauresmo, the second seed behind Maria Sharapova, fought past Shenay Perry 6-3, 6-4.

The Frenchwoman, who also won Wimbledon last year for Grand Slam success after a decade of frustration, proved too powerful for the American but it was a decent workout ahead of her next match against Olga Poutchkova of Russia.

"(It's) not yet quite the feeling that I had at the end of the tournament last year but the first match is never easy," said the the Geneva-based 27-year-old, who has shaken off her tag as a choker.

Williams, who won the title here in 2003 and 2005, said she was feeling better than she had in a long time and believed she could win a third Australian crown.

"I'm excited to be back out here and I came out and finally did what I'm supposed to do to a certain level," she said.

Other women through included Russian seventh seed Elena Dementieva, Serbian 11th seed Jelena Jankovic and Czech Republic 10th seed Nicole Pietrangeli.

Real pounce

FROM PAGE 20

none of them seemed to be missed as Real dominated from the start.

The team was unrecognisable from the one that tamely capitulated to Deportivo Coruna and Recreativo Huelva in their last two league outings, playing with pace and aggression.

Raul limped off with a muscle injury after 15 minutes to be replaced by Robinho but Real continued to carry the game to Zaragoza.

After sustained pressure, the breakthrough finally came five minutes before halftime when Higuain controlled Robinho's deep cross and fired low across goal for Van Nistelrooy to score.

As Zaragoza, who beat Sevilla last weekend, tried to get back into the game in the second half Real exploited the space.

Substitute Ruben de la Red drew a sharp save from Cesar in a one-on-one after 68 minutes and soon afterwards Robinho broke and shot just wide.

The visitors came closest to scoring when Gerard Pique's header from a corner late on came back off the bar.

Emotions boiled over after the final whistle when Capello twice made a rude gesture towards some fans in the last of the pitch.

Raul denies

FROM PAGE 20

on Merseyside and continue the revolution that he started.

"It was pretty serious and for Rafa it was clearly a temptation because Real Madrid is his club. He has been there as a player and as a coach," said Parry.

"It will always be an opportunity he will have to consider but we sat down for a few hours together and talked about the direction the club was taking."

"He believed in the direction we are taking and he believed in the way we are going about it. We are all passionate to win trophies and the one we would really love to win is the Premier League."

Vogts to guide

FROM PAGE 20

He will also be expected to lay a solid foundation for Nigeria's qualifying campaign for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa after the Eagles failed to reach the last World Cup in Germany.

Former international defender Austin Equavoen, who has been caretaker boss since June 2005, is expected to assist the new foreign coach.

BBC Cricket

AFP, Centurion

Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq said there would be three or four changes of personnel ahead of the second Test against South Africa starting in Port Elizabeth Friday.

"We will come back hard," said Inzamam after Pakistan were beaten by seven wickets on the fifth day of the first Test at Centurion Park Monday.

Hashim Amla (64 not out) and Jacques Kallis (60 not out) took South Africa to a comfortable win when they put on an unbeaten 119 for the fourth wicket as South Africa made light of what coach Mickey Arthur had expected to be a difficult task on a wearing pitch.

Inzamam pointed out that Pakistan were below strength because of the absence of star batsman Mohammad Yousuf and an injury to fast bowler Umar Gul.

He said Yousuf, who arrived in South Africa Tuesday following the birth of a daughter in Pakistan Friday, would strengthen the batting, while he said Gul was making good progress. "He bowled five overs in the nets today (Monday) and we hope he will be ready to play."

Fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar is also expected to come into contention. He joined the touring party as cover for Gul but only arrived the day before the first Test.

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South African captain Graeme Smith hailed his side's third win in as many weeks. "We had to work really hard in the middle of the match."

Smith said the pitch had not suited South Africa's fast bowlers.

"We joked that last week (against India in Cape Town) we won at Eden Gardens and this week we won at Lahore," said Smith. "The wickets haven't been natural South African wickets where our fast bowlers have been able to bowl their natural lines."

Smith said the introduction of left-arm spinner Paul Harris had strengthened the team. "He's made a big impact and we were able to build pressure on the Pakistan batsmen in the second innings."

Smith acknowledged that Pakistan would be stronger in the remaining two Tests. He said Yousuf was a world-class batsman but pointed out: "In South Africa we have dealt with him pretty well. We have had decent game plans against him so we will have to go back and review those plans."

Smith said Amla's second half-century of the match had been an important breakthrough for the player. "Today was about pressure, about batting well in the fourth innings. Hashim and Jacques were superb."

"For Hashim it's the first time at international level he's had to bat out to win a Test match and that's a huge notch on his belt."

Leg-spinner Danish Kaneria,

who had been expected to be Pakistan's dangleman, gained some sharp turn at times but was unable to take a wicket in 24.5 overs.

Amla was beaten twice in the first over of the day by Kaneria but played the spin bowler with increasing confidence.

Nightwatchman Harris was the only batsman to be dismissed, caught at cover off Mohammad Asif for seven.

Play started 45 minutes late because of a wet outfield caused by overnight rain.

South Africa, who resumed at 69 for two, lost Harris in the sixth over of the day when he drove Asif uppishly and Faisal Iqbal held an easy catch.

Kallis, South Africa's most experienced batsman, started cautiously before batting with confidence and taking over as the senior partner, while man-of-the-match Amla played a sound supporting role in making his second half-century of the match.

The pair added 119 off 227 balls and were seldom trouble, especially in scoring the 77 runs they still needed after lunch.

South Africa set up the win when they took a 104-run first innings lead despite batting second, with a century by Ashwell Prince and half-centuries by Amla and Herschelle Gibbs making the bulk of the runs.

Asif, who were exonerated of doping charges despite testing positive for nandrolone, another PCB official said.

The Board has concerns traces of nandrolone might remain in their body by the time the World Cup is played and they could be targeted for random tests by the International Cricket Council and WADA agents in the tournament.

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