



West Indies players engage in stretching exercises at the Vidarbha Cricket Association Stadium in Nagpur on Saturday ahead of their first ODI against India on Sunday.

Windies say all OK

Cricket

AFP, Bridgetown

Despite worries over hotels, stadiums and visas, it's beginning to look like the World Cup is coming to the Caribbean as the 50-day countdown to the opening ceremony begins.

Officials from the nine host nations are busily putting things in place for the game's biggest showpiece which officially opens in Jamaica on March 11.

But one issue which threatens to derail the arrival of thousands of fans is the CARICOM special visa which will allow visitors to travel freely throughout the Caribbean for the duration of the World Cup.

The visa will come into effect from February 1 and last until May 15.

In a historic move, the nine host nations have agreed to be treated as a single domestic space.

weights India and Pakistan, are required to have a visa.

Barbados' Deputy Prime Minister Mia Mottley has been given responsibility for the Caribbean's security arrangements for the World Cup and she has defended the controversial visa.

"The countries involved in cricket are countries that are involved in the global war against terror," she said

Vincent and Guyana have been engaged in simulations of actual match day scenarios to reassure tournament heads that they are all ready.

Further simulations will follow over the next week in Trinidad Tobago, followed by Grenada, and St. Kitts Nevis.

Barbados, St. Lucia, Antigua Barbuda and Jamaica will hold their trials next month.

Depending on to whom you speak, Caribbean people are still taking hosting of the World Cup in stride.

It is also very evident in the pattern of ticket sales for which organisers have had to issue several reminders to locals.

Though they all know what is at stake, they have berated the heavy spending. Many feel that the vast sums spent on the World Cup could have been invested in improving roadways, enhancing hospitals, constructing homes for the underprivileged, providing better public transportation, and upgrading other basic social services.

Hartley Henry, a regional political strategist, aptly summed up the general feeling in his column in the Nation newspaper in Barbados.

Zimbabwe want Taibu back

INTERNET, undated

A report in the Zimbabwe Independent claims that Zimbabwe Cricket is making a desperate attempt to lure back Tatenda Taibu before the February 11 deadline when squads for the World Cup have to be named.

Taibu retired from international cricket more than a year ago after his family was threatened by people with links to both the government and cricket.

Since then he has played in Bangladesh, England and at the moment is turning out for Namibia in South African domestic competition.

Zimbabwe's cricket, meanwhile, has continued to lurch from crisis to crisis, and following a 5-0 one-day whitewash in Bangladesh at the end of last year, there are real fears that the side could face humiliation in the World Cup.

While Taibu was deeply unhappy with Peter Chingoka, ZC's chairman, it is understood that the real obstacle to his return is the 38,000 dollars he is owed by the board for outstanding match fees.

Australian Open

INTERNET, undated

Maria Sharapova's offseason had a few of the usual things: a couple of sponsor commitments and a few days lying on the beach. It also had an unusual activity: a swing through the jungle at the end of a rope.

The Russian star spent 10 days at a resort in Costa Rica before flying Down Under for the Australian Open, and took a wilderness tour in the Central American country that included flying 400 meters in the air, going 40 mph, on a skinny little rope," she said on her Web site.

"It's so fun, so surreal, you're on a different planet when you do those kind of things," Sharapova said Saturday after advancing to the fourth round of the year's first Grand Slam with a 6-3, 6-1 win against Italy's Tathiana Garbin.

"I love to get an adrenaline rush," she said. "There's only so much sitting on the beach you can do."

In her Internet posting, Sharapova said she spent time laying by the pool and seaside at the resort, and with slices of cucumber on her eyes during daily spa treatments before boredom set in.

SECRETS

Spadea and Jan Herynych of the Czech Republic beat Daniele Bracciali of Italy and Dominik Hrbaty of Slovakia in three sets. A day earlier, Spadea lost his second-round singles match to Hrbaty in four sets.

BON APPETITE: Amelie Mauresmo's off-court routine at the Australian Open includes cards, watching her compatriots' matches on TV and some fine French cuisine.

The defending women's champion is staying in the same hotel as in previous years in South Yarra, a riverside suburb that is one of Melbourne's fanciest, with upscale restaurants and boutiques.

The relaxed atmosphere extends to other French players, who also stay nearby.

"We like the area. We have our routine," she said. "Just really stay in that area, play cards with the other French guys, have some good times at night for dinner."

"We stay at the same place. A few restaurants. I didn't go to my favourite one yet, but I'm going to go soon."

The Frenchwoman has a red wine collection at home in Geneva (Bordeaux is a self-confessed weakness) and lists creamy veal stew and her mother's toasted ham and cheese sandwiches as her favourite foods.

Is the French food in Melbourne up to her usual standard?

"Yeah, it's not bad," said Mauresmo, whose 2006 Australian title began the best season of her career including a second Grand Slam at Wimbledon and the No. 1 ranking for most of the year.

Emirates braces

FROM PAGE 20 After a couple of transitional campaigns, Ferguson has sculpted a new side with enough swash in its buckle to rival Arsenal for the title of the country's most entertaining side.

And even if the current United generation go on to lift the league title, the Scot will not want that achievement stained by the memory of two defeats at the hands of his old adversary Wenger, even if Jose Mourinho and Chelsea's appearance on the scene has taken some of the heat out of their rivalry.

"I don't think there is a great deal of difference in experience between the teams," Ferguson said.

"Arsenal got to the final of the Champions League last season and that was a great bonus for them considering the number of young players they have."

Despite a stuttering start to their campaign, Arsenal passed United off the pitch on their way to a 1-0 victory at Old Trafford in October and not even Ferguson would quibble with the outcome that afternoon.

"They deserved to win that day and this should be another fantastic game," he said. "Both teams are playing excellent football and it is a difficult one to call."

Gilly bats against complacency

Cricket

AFP, Brisbane

Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist insists the Australian squad is not complacent despite being undefeated in the tri-nations one-day international series with England and New Zealand.

The Australians continued their run of victories when they beat England at the Gabba in Brisbane on Friday by four wickets.

But they were forced to fight hard for the win despite bowling the tourists out for just 155.

They lost six wickets in reaching the victory target of 156 and were in deep trouble at 108 for five before Mike Hussey came to the rescue and guided them home with an unbeaten 46.

It could have been even worse for the home side if umpire Daryl Harper had given Hussey out caught behind when the West Australian was on 19.

The decision caused an ugly confrontation on the field between Hussey, English wicketkeeper Paul

Nixon and bowler James Anderson, with Hussey admitting later he should have been given out.

Australia eventually cruised to victory and secured a bonus point to almost guarantee themselves a place in the final of the tournament and now travel to Sydney to meet New Zealand, who have lost both their matches so far.

Gilchrist hit back at suggestions the Australians were taking the series lightly and said good English bowling, a tricky wicket and poor shot selection were the reasons for Friday's poor showing.

"There's no complacency in this team -- the competition for spots in our team is at the highest level and that in itself means our training sessions are really intense and at the top level, and that is being seen in what we do out on the field," Gilchrist said.

"It was good for guys to be put under pressure, but never have I thought we were getting lazy or taking anything for granted."

However, the Australians will be eyeing World Cup places as much as their New Zealand opposition on

Sunday.

While the home side go into the match with everyone fit and in top form, the New Zealanders will be missing pace spearhead Shane Bond, the one bowler to consistently trouble the Australian top order.

Bond is out with a back injury and his place has been taken by 32-year-old Michael Mason.

The Black Caps are also missing key players Scott Styris, Jacob Oram and Kyle Mills through injury.

Styris and Oram will rejoin the squad before New Zealand's clash with England in Adelaide on Tuesday, but Mills may miss the entire series.

In Bond's absence Wellington fast bowler Mark Gillespie, who has impressed in the first two games of the series, will take the new ball.

"The new ball is what I know," Gillespie said. "I've done it all my life so the extra responsibility, I'll just thrive off it."

"You work on bowling plans to each batter but as far as their name goes, they're just another batter."

"As far as their superstar status goes, it doesn't worry me."

When you come down to a Grand Slam, it's always nice to save your energy. I'm definitely not complaining about that," said the Belgian fourth seed, who will retire at the end of the season to settle down.

Martina Hingis, who made a spectacular return from retirement to reach the quarterfinals last year, admonished herself for too many unforced errors but always looked comfortable beating Japan's Aiko Nakamura 6-2, 6-1.

"It's always a great feeling to be in the second week of a Grand Slam, that's what you come here for," she said.

"Being seeded sixth, that's what you expect at least -- I'm happy I was able to at least fulfil my commitment so far."

Hingis and Clijsters have been so dominant in the early rounds that they have a competition seeing who can crush their opponents quickest, a race Clijsters won by two minutes Saturday with her 60 minute victory.

Shoaib surprised

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African bowlers and Makhaya Ntini in particular, with 4 for 18 in his 10 overs, ripped through their top order leaving them tottering on 135 for six, with only Inzamamul Haq and the tail to bat.

Mohammedan recover

FROM PAGE 17

bowler. The off-spinner took 4-24 from just 27 deliveries to fold the Brothers essay for 228.

Sharif Ullah top scored with 65 for Pegasus while Brothers middle-order, despite getting starts, failed to complete the task due to lack of an anchoring role.

Blues capsizes

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introduce Shevchenko, opting instead to hand Shaun Wright-Phillips a left-sided role in which he has repeatedly failed to flourish.

This was no exception to that rule as Chelsea laboured to generate any kind of opening as a swirling wind made fluid football increasingly difficult.

Liverpool, for the most part, were content to sit on their lead, although they could and should have killed the contest by taking one of the three chances they generated in quick succession around the hour mark.

Two of them were wasted by Peter Crouch, who nodded Steve Finnan's whipped cross tamely into the arms of Cech from inside the six-yard box, then produced an equally insipid header as he followed up the rebound from a 40-yard Rise drive that had clattered against the bar with the Chelsea goalkeeper beaten.

Kuyt then volleyed wide at the back post after the energetic Risee had got round Geremi on the left.

Shevchenko got his chance with 17 minutes left but by then Chelsea were a beaten team.



Australian hope Lleyton Hewitt screams out in frustration after missing a shot during his match against Chilean Fernando Gonzalez in the third round of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Saturday.

Inzy puts Pakistan

FROM PAGE 17

17th five-wicket haul in Tests.

Inzamam was fortunate to survive an appeal for a catch behind off Andre Nel when he was on 13 in the over after Sami's dismissal.

The ball went through to wicketkeeper Mark Boucher off Inzamam's pad and umpire Peter Parker gave him not out. But slow motion replays showed that he got an inside edge to the ball before it brushed his pad.

Inzamam was dropped on 35. An attempted hook shot against Jacques Kallis ballooned off his glove but Boucher, leaping high to his left, could only get the tip of his left glove to the ball.

Pakistan's ninth wicket fell at 191 when Inzamam was on 31 and he added another 61 runs before the last wicket fell.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the second Test between South Africa and Pakistan at St George's Park on Saturday:

Younis Khan c Gibbs b Ntini	45			
Hameed c De Villiers b Ntini	2			
Yousuf Ibw b Pollock	32			
Akmal c Prince b Nel	33			
Sami c Boucher b Ntini	10			
Inzamam not out	92			
Akhtar c Boucher b Kallis	4			
Kaneria c Gibbs b Pollock	1			
Asif b Ntini	7			
Extras: (b-4, lb-11, nb-1, w-5, pen-5)	26			
Total: (All out in 76 overs)	265			
Fall of wickets: 1-0 2-17 3-19 4-79 5-135 6-135 7-166 8-184 9-191.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Nel	23	2	68	1
Ntini	21	6	59	6
Kallis	13	0	56	1
Pollock	14	2	42	2
Harris	5	1	20	0
SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings				
Smith c Inzamam b Asif	10			
De Villiers not out	10			
Amla not out	2			
Extras: (nb-3)	3			
Total: (For for 1 wkt in 13 overs)	25			
Fall of wicket: 1-18.				
To bat: J Kallis, H Gibbs, A Prince, M Boucher, S Pollock, P Harris, A Nel, M Ntini.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Asif	7	4	10	1
Sami	6	2	15	0