

Bryan brothers wins doubles

AFP, Melbourne

Chest-bumping American brothers Bob and Mike Bryan successfully defended their Australian Open men's doubles title Saturday, beating Sweden's Jonas Björkman and Max Mirnyi of Belarus 7-5, 7-5.

The top seeded Americans, who lost in the final here in 2004 and 2005 before finally lifting the trophy last year, were on top throughout and never looked like losing.

They served hard and at the body with one player tight on the net to zero in the volleys, allowing the second seeded Björkman-Mirnyi team little chance to get through their defences.

They took the first set with a single break in 43 minutes but the second was a tougher affair.

The Bryans, who have made a habit of bumping their chests together after winning crucial points, finally got the break they were chasing in the 12th game.

They ground down Björkman's serve to win the title on their sixth championship point in 1hr 33mins.

"We were lucky today," said Bob Bryan. "They are a great team but this has been a perfect start to the year for us."

The two teams are great rivals, playing in their seventh straight final against each other.

Björkman and Mirnyi had the edge coming into the match, having won their last three meetings, including the French Open final last year.

It was the Bryans' 11th Grand Slam final having won four previously -- the French Open (2003), US Open (2005), Australian Open (2006) and Wimbledon (2006) to make them the first doubles team to win all four majors in Open-Era history.

Mirnyi paid them tribute.

"I've said it before -- they are the best ambassadors for our sport and they proved it once again today," he said.

Björkman and Mirnyi are French Open doubles champions but had never got beyond the semi-finals at Melbourne Park before this year.

Amazingly, it was the first time since 1976 that the top two seeds had met in a men's doubles final here.

Ronaldo

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about Ronaldo is difficult for me as I am one of his fans. He was already number one in the world when I was a teenager and I dreamed of

playing alongside him. "Ronnie" is a great player who can still do a lot."

Stephen glorifies

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with oppressively hot conditions forecast.

Seamer Kyle Mills' comeback could also be delayed because of the heat.

Fleming said the Kiwis wanted to beat Australia, but admitted their main focus was on finishing above England in the tri-series in order to reach the finals.

He said this would be reflected in team selection, with New Zealand to play England again on Tuesday in a match that could decide which side made the finals.

"You have got to prioritise a little bit," he said.

"You want to win each game and I want to beat Australia, but we have to be smart about our resources and look towards the finals, if we can get there."

Fleming said the Black Caps remained confident Australia were within reach despite being unbeaten after five games.

"Of course they are beatable, but you have to play well to do it and we haven't played well enough so far," he said.

"We played okay in Sydney and got close. We've competed in good areas for pockets, just not long enough. I don't think we are too far away."

For my sister'

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to 15 years in jail.

"I have so many good memories of my sister," added Williams.

"I remember just so many, so many things from her."

"She was always so happy for me and Venus. She would come travel with us with her kids sometimes. You know, we had so many unbelievable memories. I take solace in those memories."

Venus and Serena are the youngest of five daughters raised by Richard Williams and Oracene Price, who are now divorced.

Three older daughters -- Yentude, Isha and Lyndrea -- were the children of Oracene Price and a former husband, Yusef Rasheed.

Williams was written off by many pundits before the tournament after slipping to 81 in the world, and while she wanted to win for Yentude, she was also driven by proving her critics wrong.

"It was an awesome win because I had so many critics, so many people talking bad and saying negative things and saying I wasn't fit when I felt that I was really fit and could last three sets and two-and-a-half or three hours, no worries," she said.

"There's a great satisfaction holding up the Grand Slam trophy and proving everyone wrong."



PHOTO: AFP

Bryan brothers Bob (L) and Mike of the United States pose with the men's doubles trophy at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Saturday.

Afridi, Razzaq recalled

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Fit-again all-rounder Abdul Razzaq and hard-hitting Shahid Afridi were recalled Saturday for Pakistan's five-match one-day series against South Africa starting early next month.

The 31-year-old Akhtar, sent as a replacement for the injured Gul, tore his hamstring in the second Test in Port Elizabeth. The 23-year-old Gul twisted his ankle during a warm-up match and played no part in the Test series.

Also back in the 17-man squad is lanky fast bowler Shabbir Ahmed, whose one-year ban over an illegal bowling action ended last month.

"We hope that these players will boost the Pakistan team for the one-day series and Razzaq and Ahmed have proved their fitness before our physiotherapist Grant Compton," chief selector Wasim Bari told AFP.

Dashings opener Imran Nazir, 25, also earned a recall after two and a half years, mainly for strong performances in domestic competitions.

"Nazir has shown he has overcome his poor form and we have rewarded him for his good showing in the local competitions," said Bari.

"I know I have to lift my game

Razzaq, 27, missed the Test series between the two nations because of a calf muscle injury.

Pakistan have already been hit by injuries to key pacemen Shoaib Akhtar and Umar Gul, who have both returned home from South Africa.

The 31-year-old Akhtar, sent as a replacement for the injured Gul, tore his hamstring in the second Test in Port Elizabeth. The 23-year-old Gul twisted his ankle during a warm-up match and played no part in the Test series.

Pakistan will play a Twenty20 international against South Africa in Johannesburg on February 2 before the one-day series starts at Centurion on February 4.

The remaining matches will be played in Durban (February 7), Port Elizabeth (February 9), Cape Town (February 11) and Johannesburg (February 14).

Both face a race against time to win a place in the team for the World Cup in the West Indies, starting in March.

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