

Zia, Reefat start well

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmasters Ziaur Rahman and Reefat Bin Sattar won in the opening round of the eighth United Insurance and Leasing Grandmasters Chess tournament at the NSC conference room yesterday.

Zia beat his Biman teammate FM Mehdi Hasan while Reefat defeated Abdul Maleq. Iran's Grandmaster Ghaem Maghami Ehsan drew with FM Aminal Islam while junior champion Minhazuddin Ahmed also drew with veteran GM Niaz Mursheed.

India's IM PDS Girinath beat Chanchal Ghosh as did IM Mahmood Lodi of Pakistan who beat Monir Hossain.

Miandad can still coach Pakistan

PTI, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain and coach Javed Miandad is ready to give a serious thought to coaching the national team again if the cricket board offered him the job.

Miandad, who has coached senior team on three separate terms but was removed acrimoniously on all occasions, said he had always kept national interest above everything else.

"It is a hypothetical question but I can only think about it if the offer comes to me. I have to think about various options if any offer comes through," he said.

Miandad did not apply for the job, for which PCB advertised in newspapers after the World Cup keeping May 15 as the deadline for interested candidates to submit their applications.

The former Test batsman said the Board had devalued the post of Pakistan coach by openly advertising the position.

Miandad, the country's highest run-getter with 8832 in 124 Tests, last worked with the team in 2004. He was asked to step down as coach after his team lost a historical home series to archrivals India.

He was replaced by Bob Woolmer, who died during the World Cup in mysterious circumstances a day after Pakistan's shock defeat at the hands of Ireland following which they were knocked out of the tournament.

Miandad, who will turn 50 next month, said he had served the country with honour and dignity and it was always his wish that Pakistan team perform well in the international arena.

PCB chief Naseem Ashraf, in a recent statement, had said they (PCB) were looking for a foreign coach, who would be appointed within next few months.

Dav parts with

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"Ashraf's innings brought a touch of breeze into the game. He is more keen to one-day cricket but he is very good player. If he hit the ball in the air he is going to get out. He knows that. But obviously it was a good knock," he said.

"The thing I really wish it could be better if more of the individuals evolve into better players. I would have loved Ashraf to do more in those four years."

His best cricket is clearly still to come. His consistency will improve as he gets older. He has got terrific talent, no doubt," he said.

"I will go back to Australia (laugh). I will go back and recharge the battery. You all know that there may be another challenge not far away. That will remain the decision of the employers. On the 4th of June if they make that decision, that's great. If not, that's fine," he informed, casting an aura of ambiguity over his future.

Juve capture

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The 38-year-old is reportedly seeking an improved deal and assurances that the club will hold on to key players like Trezeguet and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

Juventus, as the club at the centre of the furore over the match-fixing scandal, were stripped of the Serie A titles they won in 2004-05 and 2005-06 and denied entry into the Champions League.

They were also deducted nine points for their ultimately successful Serie B campaign.



India captain Rahul Dravid scored 129 runs from 176 balls in his final Test as the 50-year-old skipper bowed out at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on May 25. It was his twenty-fourth century, second against Bangladesh.

Rain delays inevitable

Cricket

APP, Leeds

Rain came to West Indies' aid when the first two sessions of the third day's play in their second Test against England here at Headingly on Sunday were washed out.

Groundstaff, during the lunch break, removed covers of the pitch only for rain to return and prevent a resumption before tea.

West Indies, having been made to follow-on, were facing an innings defeat of 22 for two - still a huge 402 runs shy of making England bat again - and going 1-0 down in the four-match series.

West Indies' task of saving the game was made harder by knowing that captain and top-order batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan would only, according to a team spokesman, "bat in an emergency."

Sarwan didn't bat in the first innings after sustaining a shoulder injury while fielding Friday which threatened his continued tour participation.

Chris Gayle was nine not out after nightwatchman Darren Powell was run out to the last ball of Saturday's play. Powell was one of six second day wickets for Ryan Sidebottom.

The 29-year-old Nottinghamshire left-arm seamer, playing in place of the injured Matthew Hoggard, was appearing in just his second Test six years after a wicketless debut against Pakistan at Lord's.

Scoreboard

Scoreboard at tea on the third day of the second Test between England and West Indies at Headingly on Sunday:

ENGLAND: First innings 570 for 7 dec (Vaughan 103, Pietersen 226,

Sidebottom 12 2 42 4

Harmison 12 0 55 2

Plunkett 12 1 35 3

Panesar 1 0 1 0

WEST INDIES: Second innings (overnight 22-2)

Gayle not out 9

Ganglbw b Sidebottom 11

Powell lbw b Sidebottom 0

Extras: (lb-1, nb-1) 2

Total: (For 2 wkts in 9 overs) 22

Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-22.

To bat: D Smith, R Sarwan, S Joseph, R Morton, D Bravo, D Ramdin, J Taylor, C Collymore.

Bowler O M R W

Sidebottom 5 2 12 2

Plunkett 2 0 6 0

Harmison 2 0 3 0

Safin sends Vicente packing

APP, Paris



Heavy rain and biting cold brought havoc to the opening day of the French Open on Sunday with only former world number one Marat Safin managing to book a place in the second round.

The Russian eased past Spanish qualifier Fernando Vicente 6-1, 6-3, 6-1 as the second Grand Slam tournament of the season got off to a soggy start.

Safin, the 22nd seed here and a semi-finalist in 2002, will face either Janko Tipsarevic or Dusan Vemic for a place in the third round.

The rain, which eventually brought a suspension of play to all courts at 1035GMT, came as a relief for 2002 women's champion Serena Williams.

The American winner of eight Grand Slam titles, seeded eight and playing at Roland Garros for the first time in three years, was 5-6 down to Tsvetana Pironkova when play was halted with the Bulgarian 19-year-old serving for the opening

unpredictable Russian managed to win consecutive matches at the same tournament.

On Sunday, the 27-year-old, who had lost to Vicente in St Petersburg in 2003 in their only previous encounter, was never in trouble unleashing his big, double-fisted backhand to devastating effect.

Once he had enjoyed three comfortable breaks in the first set, which was wrapped up in only 25 minutes, Safin was cruising.

In stark contrast, Serena Williams was struggling against Pironkova, the world's 91.

The 25-year-old Australian Open champion slipped 2-5 down before the Bulgarian allowed her opponent to claw back to 5-5 having squandered two set points.

Later Sunday, Justin Henin, bidding for a third successive French Open title and a fourth in five years, was scheduled to open her campaign against Russia's Elena Vesnina.

But with the heavy rain expected to continue, and temperatures plummeting, it was looking increasingly likely that Safin's victory would remain the only significant action of the day.

It was also the last time the

French Open winner has endured a mediocre season so far with a best performance of a semi-final run at the Las Vegas event in March where he lost to Lleyton Hewitt.

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also took six wickets in the first Test.

"He has done well with the bat and with the ball in the first innings. He is a very good player," commented Dravid.

His views were echoed by interim coach Ravi Shastri.

"He is one quality player in this team. He has a lot of cricket ahead of him and I hope he shows his class to the world," said Shastri, who was on a one-off stint with the India team.

"I will respect my contract with ESPN and continue there but I have enjoyed my stay with the India team. The boys can tell you that," admitted Shastri who turned 45 yesterday.

It is quite important to have team spirit and I think the boys have shown great unity -- something that is quite important for the dressing-room. They showed their true characters by winning the first one-day under such heat and also in this Test."

The straight-speaking Shastri owned up to his earlier words saying, "I did not want to hurt anyone by my words as I speak like this all the time."

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