

Manavjit pips Dravid

World champion shooter Manavjit Sandhu on Thursday pipped popular cricket captain Rahul Dravid to win India's highest sporting honour for 2006.

The 30-year-old trap shooter earned the coveted award that carries a prize money of 500,000 rupees (12,500 dollars) on the recommendations of a high-powered committee headed by cricketing legend Kapil Dev.

Other players in contention for the award, known as the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, included ace golfer Jeev Milkha Singh and tennis doubles player Mahesh Bhupathi.

Sandhu won the gold medal at the 2006 world championships in Zagreb, a bronze at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne and two silvers at the Doha Asian Games.

Sandhu is the fourth shooter to win the award after Abhinav Bindra, Anjali Bhagwat and Rajyavardhan Rathore.

Other past winners include cricket superstar Sachin Tendulkar, tennis ace Leander Paes and chess player Viswanathan Anand.

There was no cricketer on the 14-strong list for the Arjuna award, the second highest sporting honours, for the third successive year.

Indian President Pratibha Patil will present the awards on August 29.

Mahela leads strong side

Mahela Jayawardene will lead a strong Sri Lankan team to the inaugural Twenty20 World Championships to be held in South Africa in September, officials said on Thursday.

The 15-man squad shows no surprises, with prolific off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran confirmed to play after earlier reports suggested that he may be rested from the 12-nation tournament.

Left-handed opener Jehan Mubarak takes over from former captain Marvan Atapattu, who earlier this week asked Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) to be released from his contract with the national team. His wish was granted Monday.

All-rounders Hasantha Fernando, Gayan Wijekoon and Kaushal Lokuarachchi have been recalled, SLC spokesman Samantha Algama said.

Sri Lanka, finalists at the 50-overs-a-side World Cup this year, have been drawn with New Zealand and Kenya in group C of the preliminary league, with the top two advancing to the Super Eights round.

The tournament, from September 11-24, features the nine nations currently playing Test cricket along with Zimbabwe, Kenya and Scotland.

Squad Mahela Jayawardene (capt), Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Kumar Sangakkara, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Silva, Chaminda Vaas, Farveez Maharoof, Muttiah Muralidaran, Lasith Malinga, Dilhara Fernando, Hasantha Fernando, Gayan Wijekoon, Kaushal Lokuarachchi, Jehan Mubarak.

Domenech's

Slovakia on August 22 as they prepare for ties against Scotland, the Faeroe Islands and Lithuania.

"I'll tell the players 'prepare for these matches. If you prepare for Italy-France we're dead'. If we get a result in Italy everyone will think we're qualified. But no it's not true," Domenech told Thursday's edition of le Parisien newspaper.

And in a swipe at Materazzi, he said: "Well I for one wouldn't mind being Materazzi. In the World Cup final, you score a goal, you have your rivals best player sent off and you score in the penalty shoot out. You can say what you want about (Andrea) Pirlo; Materazzi, is the man of the match."

Federer wins

Argentine David Nalbandian defeated Spanish number 16 David Ferrer 7-6 (7/4), 6-1.

Murray's winning return lasted just 24 hours as the Briton saw just exactly how much work it will require to return to his top-10 level, never showing peak form in the 68-minute loss.

The 20-year-old said he might not play next week and try training instead in Florida or elsewhere.

"I need to decide if I feel like I can go on the court. But this week was good for me.

"The wrist is getting better but it's not quite there yet, in a week or two weeks it should be OK. You can't get away from a wrist injury; you use it one way or another. I wanted to play here and see what I could do.

"I need to build confidence with more matches, hard work on the practice court will make me more confident."

Murray returned to tennis this week after repeatedly delaying his comeback from the injury.



Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia makes a backhand return against Jill Craybas of the United States during her match of the East West Bank Classic at Carson in California on Wednesday.

Sharapova moves into third round

Fourth-seeded Russian Nadia Petrova also advanced, beating American Lilia Osterloh 7-5, 6-3.

Sharapova, who won her first title of the season in San Diego on Sunday, had to battle to take the first set 7-6 (7/5) but was up 3-1 in the second when Greece's Daniilidou decided she couldn't continue.

She said she was still feeling the effects of an illness that had prevented her from practicing.

Jankovic, runner-up to Russian Elena Dementieva here last year, managed to shrug off the after-effects of a cold to defeat China's Peng Shuai 6-1, 6-1.

Her compatriot Ana Ivanovic, the third seed, also advanced, defeating American Ashley Harkleroad of the United States 6-4, 6-2.

Sharapova, who like all the top eight seeds enjoyed a first-round bye, was playing for the first time since she wrapped up her 16th career title Sunday with a three-set victory over Patty Schnyder in the San Diego final.

It was Sharapova's first title since winning in Linz, Austria, last October. She is hoping to keep the momentum going as she builds toward her defence of the US Open title.

In the third round she'll face Michaela Krajicek of the Netherlands, who advanced on Tuesday.

Ivanovic was playing for the first time since falling in the semi-finals at Wimbledon to eventual champion Venus Williams and booked a clash with Czech Lucie Safarova, who beat Ai Sugiyama.

In other matches, Israeli Shahar Peer's struggles continued as she fell 6-1, 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) to France's Virginie Razzano.

Ranked 18th in the world, Peer has failed to advance past the round of 16 in three events since Wimbledon.

Up next for Razzano is India's Sania Mirza, who is having one of the best summers of any player on the tour. The 20-year-old upset No. 7 Martina Hingis in the second round on Tuesday.

In the last month, she has reached the semi-finals at Cincinnati, the finals at Stanford and the quarterfinals in San Diego.

Along the way, she has become the first Indian woman to crack the top 30 in the world rankings.

Defending champion Dementieva needed just 54 minutes to dismiss American wild card Madison Brengle 6-2, 6-0.

She next faces fifth-seeded Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) winner over American Jill Craybas.

The squad, which will have a boot-camp at Sylhet cantonment from August 11-16, will play a tri-nation tournament in Nairobi involving hosts Kenya and Pakistan from August 31 to September 5 before heading to South Africa.

Madrid recovered, Guti coming close, before Baptista - of whom new coach Bernd Schuster is a big fan - replaced Balboa in midfield.

And from then on, Los Merengues looked somewhat improved, bossing the centre of the pitch to the same extent as before, but also managing to find some cohesion in the final third.

Baptista and Guti both had chances, but the game was winding down swiftly.

Just when it seemed that it was destined to end up 0-0 after 90 minutes, Robinho pulled off a last-gasp goal.

His short run foxed all defenders and his low shot found no opposition in O Belem 'keeper Marco Goncalves.

The Portuguese defence had gone to sleep but, by allowing Robinho's effort to slip through his hands and over the line - Raul following up to make sure - the goalkeeper ensured that the match ended on a whimper and not a bang.

So, Madrid had done it, and will advance to the final. They were seldom threatened by an inferior side here, but coach Bernd Schuster will wonder what became of his team's attacking play since that 5-2 win in Moscow just last week.

Los Merengues take on Deportivo in the final, after the Galicians defeated Serie A side Atalanta 7-6 on penalties.

Let the action commence.

Let the action commence.

Vettori named Kiwi captain

New Zealand selectors on Thursday said they would not send Test skipper Stephen Fleming to the ICC Twenty20 World Championships in order to blood Daniel Vettori as captain.

Fleming stood down as the Black Caps one-day captain to concentrate on his Test career following New Zealand's World Cup semi-final loss to Sri Lanka earlier this year and selectors are looking to Vettori to fill the void.

New Zealand coach John Bracewell said including Fleming in the squad travelling to South Africa in September could have proved a distraction.

"This is the first opportunity for Daniel to captain the team abroad and we wanted to ensure that Daniel and the team were not looking to him (Fleming) for leadership," Bracewell said.

Vettori has already expressed his interest in captaining the one-day side in the absence of Fleming and his installation as Twenty20 skipper signals a changing of the guard.

While the spinner has acted as stand-in captain in New Zealand when Fleming has been unavailable, the Twenty20 tournament is the first time he has been handed the skipper's armband overseas.

The New Zealand squad included two new caps in all rounders Nathan McCullum and Bradley Scott.

Wicketkeeper Gareth Hopkins also earned a recall as back-up to Brendon McCullum.

Squad Daniel Vettori (Captain), Shane Bond, Peter Fulton, Mark Gillespie, Gareth Hopkins, Chris Martin, Craig McMillan, Brendon McCullum, Nathan McCullum, Jacob Oram, Jeetan Patel, Bradley Scott, Scott Styris (subject to fitness), Ross Taylor, Lou Vincent.

Stadium boost for ICL

Even as the BCCI's flip-flop over the Indian Cricket League continues, Railway Minister and Bihar Cricket Association President Laloo Prasad today openly backed the ICL, saying the million-dollar tournament could be played on Railways stadiums.

Prasad described the ICL as a "good initiative" and said competition was good for the game.

"It is a good initiative. It will give rise to competition and good players will be encouraged. The parallel league is a good thing for those who complain that they were not selected or were ignored. This competition will be good for spotting good players," he said on the sidelines of a press conference at the Rail Bhawan.

MU confidence Like Rooney, his new Argentine colleague has functioned best as a deep-lying striker. But Ferdinand has already had plenty of positive feedback from his brother Anton, who played with Tevez at West Ham last season, and he has no doubts he will prove to be worth the months of transfer wrangling.

"I have spoken to Anton about him loads," Ferdinand said. "My brother is always saying what a fantastic footballer Tevez is and he thinks he will be a great acquisition for us."

"As players, we are just like fans really. We are really excited to have new players coming in and can't wait to see what they can do."

"He has only trained with us a couple of times but already we can see what he is all about."

Real sneak

Madrid recovered, Guti coming close, before Baptista - of whom new coach Bernd Schuster is a big fan - replaced Balboa in midfield.

And from then on, Los Merengues looked somewhat improved, bossing the centre of the pitch to the same extent as before, but also managing to find some cohesion in the final third.

Baptista and Guti both had chances, but the game was winding down swiftly.

Just when it seemed that it was destined to end up 0-0 after 90 minutes, Robinho pulled off a last-gasp goal.

His short run foxed all defenders and his low shot found no opposition in O Belem 'keeper Marco Goncalves.

The Portuguese defence had gone to sleep but, by allowing Robinho's effort to slip through his hands and over the line - Raul following up to make sure - the goalkeeper ensured that the match ended on a whimper and not a bang.

So, Madrid had done it, and will advance to the final. They were seldom threatened by an inferior side here, but coach Bernd Schuster will wonder what became of his team's attacking play since that 5-2 win in Moscow just last week.

Los Merengues take on Deportivo in the final, after the Galicians defeated Serie A side Atalanta 7-6 on penalties.

A forgotten story

INTERNET, undated

In all likelihood, this week's Oval Test will be the last Sachin Tendulkar plays on English soil. Based on an almost studious search for batting perfection, Tendulkar has enjoyed a stellar career. But for all the dedication and sacrifice, he might have been upstaged by a rough diamond called Vinod Kambli, a batsman who started out every bit as gifted as the little master.

Sport is littered with tales of what might have been, of talent flushed down the gurgler. But Kambli's story, particularly when placed beside that of his childhood friend, Tendulkar, is a modern tale of how quickly sport's shining paths can lead to a dead end once the small details are ignored.

A year older than Tendulkar, Kambli was every bit as much the schoolboy prodigy as his fluffy-haired chum. When the pair played for Shardashram Vidyamandir School against St Xavier's College in 1988, they shared an unbeaten stand of 664.

In terms of run-making talent, there wasn't much between them, though Kambli's left-handedness suggested a flashiness of which the right-handed and right-minded Tendulkar could never be accused.

Tales of greatness can often be exaggerated, and while the streets of Mumbai buzzed with excited talk of the city's two teenage stars, the next step up often causes the rave notices to be reviewed. Not in their case. In 1989, England had a warm-up game for the Nehru Cup in Delhi, and both played. So did Angus Fraser, Phil DeFreitas, Eddie

Hemmings and me. Thankfully, it was a 50-over match and we managed to win, but if memory serves both made unbeaten half-centuries -- remarkable given Tendulkar was just 16 and Kambli 17.

Within a month, Tendulkar was making his Test debut against Pakistan, a rough baptism that saw him struck on the head. Kambli had to wait another three years to join him in the Test team, a gap that caused him to later quip that "while Sachin had taken the elevator, he'd taken the stairs." It seemed a neat soundbite, though some saw it as a coded barb over the way caste dictates opportunity in India -- Tendulkar coming from lofty stock, Kambli from lower-middle.

Kambli soon made up for lost time, carving England's confused bowling attack for a double hundred in his third Test. In the team meeting beforehand, one of England's pace bowlers had piped up that he could get him out with an orange. When Kambli reached 200 in front of an ecstatic home crowd in Mumbai, Robin Smith turned to the bowler in question and said -- "don't you think it's time you pulled out that bloody orange."

After seven Tests, Kambli had scored 773 runs at an average of 113.2, including a washed-out match in which he did not bat. Only cricketing icons Don Bradman, Sunil Gavaskar, Everton Weekes, George Headley and Frank Worrell have scored more. Suddenly Little Lord Sachin was not the only deity in town.

Success and the adoration that breeds can bring unimaginable riches in India. But you can play the game two ways. Be aloof but businesslike and watch the money roll

in, as Tendulkar has, or get sucked into the fame game, something Kambli, with his sudden passion for bling and booze, did rather too enthusiastically for those running Indian cricket.

When it came, his fall was sudden and permanent. A weakness against short-pitched fast bowling (he kept flashing catches to gully), played its part, but his off-the-field lifestyle clearly irked those in charge. Most batsmen sporting an average of 54.2 -- especially ones good enough to cane Shane Warne for 22 in an over -- are given the chance to iron out any flaws. Not Kambli, and while his one-day career stuttered on until the 2000 ICC Trophy in Nairobi, he never played another Test.

Kambli continues to play cricket for Mumbai, though an acting career in Bollywood -- he once played a mechanic in a film called Annarth -- appears to have stalled. India was still a conservative place when he first announced himself all gilt and flash in the early Nineties. Fifteen years on and the country, with its burgeoning economy, has caught him up and attitudes have changed, though too late to salvage his cricket career.

So as Tendulkar takes his bow at the Oval this week, possibly with a 38th hundred to his name, remember his old mate Kambli -- a man with talent to burn, and a compulsion to set it alight at both ends.

Authorities had wanted five selectors on the panel, but only two were available to pick the team for the 12-nation tournament in South Africa next month.

Lokuge had originally appointed Asantha de Mel, Ranjith Madurasinghe, Don Anurasiri, Ranil Abeynayake and Mahes Goonathilake as selectors for Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) on July 31.

Abeynayake and Goonathilake declined to take up the job, forcing the sports minister to change his mind and ask a previously sacked selector, Amal Silva, to rejoin the panel.

Silva, who hit a century at Lord's in 1984, also refused, claiming he felt slighted to be dropped in the first place.

"Amal Silva has resigned and I asked Sri Lanka Cricket to pick the team with the three available members," Lokuge said.

But with Anurasiri managing the Sri Lanka 'A' team in England, only de Mel and Madurasinghe were at hand to choose the national squad.

Goonathilake said he would become selector only if it was a full-time paid job, but the sports minister declined.

"We cannot have full-time paid selectors for sports," Lokuge said.

"But I have told Sri Lanka Cricket that I have no objection if the selectors are given an allowance and other perks such as official transport", the minister said.

Catch of the year

enforced in the case of the Bonds ball.

History does not provide much of a guide since most fans who have been lucky enough to snag previous long balls have chosen to sell their mementos. And at least one ball was as much a source of embarrassment for the IRS as revenue.

As Mark McGwire chased the mark for most home runs in a season in 1998, IRS officials initially said the ball that broke Roger Maris' long-standing record could be subject to taxes even if it were returned to McGwire. The statements were ridiculed by politicians and quickly disavowed by the agency's top brass.

"All I know is that the fan who gives back the home run ball deserves a round of applause, not a big tax bill," then-IRS Commissioner Charles Rossotti said at the time.

Ultimately, Tim Forneris, a member of the St. Louis Cardinals grounds crew, recovered McGwire's 62nd home run ball. He turned it over to the Cardinals and received a trip to Disney World and a minivan in return.

Phil Ozersky, a Cardinals season-ticket holder, caught McGwire's 70th homer later that season and sold it in 1999 to comic book artist Todd McFarlane for \$3 million.

A spokeswoman for the Giants said that as with any ball that enters the stands at AT&T Park, Bonds' 435-foot drive into the right-center field stands belonged to the person who caught it, so the team wouldn't seek its return. Bonds said he also had no interest in retrieving it.

Murphy, who went to the game during a layover from a flight to Australia, grew up near Shea Stadium and was wearing a Mets jersey when he made the charmed grab.

He told the New York Daily News he planned to keep 51 percent of the proceeds from the sale of the ball and would give the rest to his

friend, Amir Kamal, 21, of New York, who was also at the game.

"I won the lottery," he told the newspaper. "I'm going to be smart about what I do with it."

SLC faces trouble

A depleted selection panel picked Sri Lanka's Twenty-20 World Championships team Thursday following a spate of no-shows and resignations from the committee, sports minister Gamini Lokuge told AFP.

Authorities had wanted five selectors on the panel, but only two were available to pick the team for the 12-nation tournament in South Africa next month.

Lokuge had originally appointed Asantha de Mel, Ranjith Madurasinghe, Don Anurasiri, Ranil Abeynayake and Mahes Goonathilake as selectors for Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) on July 31.

Abeynayake and Goonathilake declined to take up the job, forcing the sports minister to change his mind and ask a previously sacked selector, Amal Silva, to rejoin the panel.

Silva, who hit a century at Lord's in 1984, also refused, claiming he felt slighted to be dropped in the first place.

"Amal Silva has resigned and I asked Sri Lanka Cricket to pick the team with the three available members," Lokuge said.

But with Anurasiri managing the Sri Lanka 'A' team in England, only de Mel and Madurasinghe were at hand to choose the national squad.

Goonathilake said he would become selector only if it was a full-time paid job, but the sports minister declined.

"We cannot have full-time paid selectors for sports," Lokuge said.

"But I have told Sri Lanka Cricket that I have no objection if the selectors are given an allowance and other perks such as official transport", the minister said.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. Includes crossword clues and a solution time of 25 mins.

CRYPTOQUIP. A grid of letters for a word search puzzle.

ON S EPQ H L P R R B Y A K H Y W N P H W J L B K W L E B B N F O Q C W L S K H B J S D S A, C O E F L Q B P D S K K F O C L O A S D O B P H ? Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SUPPOSING YOU STRAP SOMEBODY UNTIL HE STARTS SINGING, YOU MIGHT SAY YOU BELTED OUT A TUNE. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals O

FIXTURES. Table of football fixtures including Friday VFB Stuttgart v Schalke 04, Saturday Bayern Munich v Hansa Rostock, and Sunday FC Nuremberg v SC Karlsruhe.