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Did U Know?

Until 2007, the Australian Open was played on a hard court surface, called Rebound Ace, which is made of asphalt and sand.



Jelena Jankovic

(Serbian tennis star)
"Getting revenge feels so good. I'm so happy to be in the semifinal, after having no expectations, having injuries and not really thinking that I can go far."
After beating Serena Williams in the Australian Open quarterfinals.



What to WATCH

- STAR Cricket**
Australia v India
Fourth Test, Day Two
Live from 6:00am (Friday)
- TEN Sports**
Pakistan v Zimbabwe
Second ODI
Live from 10:15am
- STAR Sports**
Australian Open
Women's Singles Semifinals
Live from 8:30am
Men's Singles Semifinals
Live from 2:30pm
- ESPN**
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

Ganguly calm on exclusion

PTI, Melbourne

His axing from the Indian one-day squad for the tri-series might have created a furore back home but Sourav Ganguly is unfazed and determined to stay focussed on the crucial fourth and deciding Test match against Australia starting in Adelaide today.

"I haven't given things a thought beyond this Test. It's an important match and I've got to stay focussed. I'll think of the future once it gets over," Ganguly was quoted as saying by the 'Herald Sun' newspaper Wednesday.

The former skipper has been in superb form since his comeback and continued his good run in the ongoing Test series but his fielding skills or rather lack of it cost him the ODI berth.

Rival skipper Ricky Ponting was also surprised not to see the Bengal

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Proteas to play 3 Tests in India

AFP, New Delhi

Graeme Smith's South Africa will tour India for three Test matches in March-April, the Indian cricket board announced on Wednesday.

The South Africans will arrive in Mumbai on March 18 on the second leg of their South Asian tour after playing two Tests and three one-day internationals in Bangladesh in February-March.

The Indian tour kicks off with a three-day match at the Brabourne stadium in Mumbai from March 20-22, followed by three back-to-back Tests in Chennai, Ahmedabad and Kanpur.

TOUR SCHEDULE

- March 18: Arrival in Mumbai
March 20-22: 3-day match v India A, Mumbai
March 26-30: First Test, Chennai
April 3-7: Second Test, Ahmedabad
April 11-15: Third Test, Kanpur

Cards close to chest

Final Australia-India Test from today

AFP, Adelaide

Australia captain Ricky Ponting and his India counterpart Anil Kumble said they would not finalise their teams for the fourth and final Test until just before the match starts Thursday.

Up 2-1, the Australians are looking to win in Adelaide to clinch the series, while the tourists are confident of squaring the series after their shock win of the third Test in Perth.

The Indians are considering taking five specialist bowlers into the match, with spinner Harbhajan Singh expected to replace struggling opener Wasim Jaffer and form a dual spin attack with Kumble.

Kumble was playing his cards close to his chest here Wednesday and said a final decision on selection would be made just minutes before the match.

"There are a few possibilities but we would like to take another look at the pitch."

"It (five bowlers) is an option

and that is something we will definitely assess."

Kumble said India took great confidence from their last Test in Adelaide, which they won by four wickets in 2003.

With the pitch expected to take turn as the match progresses, Australia had been expected to recall veteran spinner Brad Hogg to replace local pace bowler Shaun Tait.

However, after misreading the pitch in Perth and erroneously opting for a pace quartet in a selection decision that backfired, Ponting now wants a last look at the Adelaide Oval wicket before setting out the final team.

"We haven't finalised our team yet, we'll sleep on it and make the announcement at the toss Thursday morning," he said.

"We've got a few things we want to run through our heads about our make up and about that wicket."

"The wicket is normally pretty good to bat on here, it looks like it will be that way, but it's actually quite dry at the moment," he said.

"We've just got to toss up in our head whether a spin option is the way to go or if we try and use pace

with variable bounce later in the game."

Tait failed to take a wicket in Perth and bowled just 21 overs for the match, while Hogg took just six wickets at 51.50 in the first two Tests.

Ponting said the fact it was his home ground could work in Tait's favour.

"It probably does because he's taken wickets for South Australia here over a long period of time now, whether it be early in the game with the new ball or late in the game when it does start keeping a little bit low," he said.

"His style of bowling is obviously suited to these conditions," he said. "When you've got a wicket taker like that in the wings it gives you lots of options, but it makes your decision pretty difficult as well."

Ponting noted that the Australian philosophy was to play a specialist spinner, a theory abandoned in the third Test for the first time since 1992.

He said Hogg was more than able if recalled.

"If he does come in, it's obviously pretty important that he's not

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Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) and VVS Laxman (2nd from L) joke around while Sachin Tendulkar (2nd from R) and Sourav Ganguly look on during India's practice yesterday ahead of today's final Test against Australia at the Adelaide Oval.

Easy win for Academy

SPORTS REPORTER

GP-BCB National Cricket Academy predictably made a flying start against Hong Kong as they registered a 71-run victory in the first one-day of the three-match series at the Hong Kong Cricket Club ground yesterday.

The visitors amassed 271-9 in 48 overs after being sent into bat first. Opener Imrul Kayes was the top-scorer with 80 while Nayem Islam hammered an unbeaten 59.

Irfan Ahmed claimed three wickets for the hosts.

In reply, Hong Kong only made 200-8 in 45 overs with Munir Dar making 50. The hosts were penalised three overs for slow over-rate.

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Kolkata veterans play first match today

SPORTS REPORTER

The former Kolkata-based stars of Indian football will play their first exhibition match in Dhaka today.

Sonali Otit Club, led by Maj (ret) Hafizuddin will face the Veterans Sports Club of Kolkata, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday, in the opener of three friendlies at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The match will kick off at 3.30pm.

The Kolkata Veterans, captained by former Indian international Bishwajit Bhattacharyya who led an Indian selection in the 1977 Aga Khan Gold Cup, were given a hearty welcome at the Benapole border earlier in the afternoon.

They will play Chittagong Sonali Otit at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong on January 25 and play the Manikganj old-timers in Manikganj on January 29.

The visitors will bring a host of former internationals including Kompton Dutta, Alok Mukherjee, Alok Das, Aurup Das and Gautam Ghosh, informed Sonali Otit officials at a press briefing at their club yesterday.

Sonali Otit general secretary Mosabber Hossain, former national captain Badal Roy, ex-national midfielder Satyajit Das Rupu and coach Abu Noman Nannu were also present.

Sonali Otit had toured Kolkata in 1997 to play against the Veterans Sports Club in a bid to strengthen the bond between footballers from both sides of the border.

Sonali Otit also became runners-up in a three-nation tournament in Kolkata last year.

Rangs Toshiba Golf starts in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

The three-day Rangs Toshiba Golf Tournament 2008 commenced here at the picturesque Shaheen Golf Country Club in Patenga yesterday amid much enthusiasm.

Air Commodore M Golam Haider inaugurated the meet in the afternoon as chief guest. Rumeesh Hossain, managing director of Rangs Industries Ltd, was present as special guest. Group Captain Mohammed Belal and Zaidul Huda, head of marketing Rangs Ltd, were also present.

A total of 150 golfers competed on the first day. Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman will attend tomorrow's closing ceremony as chief guest.

Kumble eyes fitting finish

AFP, Adelaide

India captain Anil Kumble said Wednesday he was hoping to end his Test career on Australian soil on a high note with a series-equalling win in the fourth and final Test at Adelaide Oval.

The 37-year-old veteran of 124 Tests is certain the Test starting Thursday will be his last in Australia, as it is also likely to be for star batsmen Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid (both 34), Sourav Ganguly (35) and even VVS Laxman (33).

"For sure, this will be my last one in Australia so it'll be nice to go back with a victory," Kumble said Wednesday.

"It's been fantastic, this is my third trip to Australia and I've really enjoyed all three visits."

Adelaide holds a special place in Kumble's heart, for both personal and team reasons.

It was here India won by four wickets in 2003 to level the series, and that a recalled Kumble produced his breakthrough perfor-

mance on Australian soil with six wickets.

He said that match was a turning point in a career that has now produced 603 Test wickets, the third highest tally ever.

"This is indeed a special venue because it all started here in 2003-04," he recalled.

"It was important that we won that Test match and the last four years have been fantastic for me personally and also for Indian cricket."

Although India will lose a wealth of experience and talent when the senior players retire, the performance of its unheralded young attack in the series has given Kumble great confidence for the future.

"It is difficult to replace anybody, we can possibly see that in the Aussie team itself," he said.

"Every team will undergo the transition and how we do that transition is going to be the key."

"India is definitely talented in what we have back home, it is just a matter of ensuring they get the confidence and in four or five years' time we'll have a good set of

players who will be able to ensure that Indian cricket moves forward."

Down 2-1 after their shock win in the third Test in Perth, Kumble wants his team to win here and square the series for the second time in as many Australian tours.

Although they can't regain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Kumble said a win here would provide a further shot in the arm for Indian cricket.

He is confident an Indian team will soon create history and win a series in Australia.

"In terms of results, the last visit was fantastic and even this one as well," he said.

"As a senior group we came in with the purpose of winning a series in Australia, we haven't been able to achieve that, but at least we can go back with our heads held high."

"Future Indian teams that come here will look at the performances from the past and I'm sure they'll do what we could not achieve here, so that's something I'm really proud of."

AFP, Adelaide

Australia captain Ricky Ponting has done some extra homework on Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh ahead of the fourth Test at the Adelaide Oval, starting here Thursday.

Harbhajan was dropped by India for their third Test, but expectations of a spin-friendly wicket here are likely to see him return to resume his duel with Ponting.

Ponting has fallen to his Indian nemesis eight times in as many Tests, and was dismissed by the off-spinner three times in the first two Tests of the series.

With just 128 runs at 21.33 in the series, Ponting has been well below his prolific best and said he realised he needed to counter the hold Harbhajan appeared to have over him.

"I've analysed things a little bit," he said.

"I'm not a huge analyst of things that have happened in the past but I'll sit down, well I have already this week with the likelihood of him coming back in, and just have a think about how I'm going to play him."

"I think a couple of times this series he got me out either first or second ball a couple of times so I haven't really had a chance to try and impose myself on him too much there."

India captain Anil Kumble conceded that his team's ability to contain Ponting had been a big factor in the series thus far.

Although Harbhajan had the early ascendancy over Ponting, the Australian was also troubled by young paceman Ishant Sharma in the third Test and fell to him in both innings.

Kumble said he didn't mind who dismissed Ponting, as long as the trend of low scores by the Tasmanian continued.

"As long as we keep doing that, it doesn't matter who the bowler is, if he can get Ricky out quickly that will be great for us."

"He's definitely a key batsman for the Aussies and as long as we can keep that going for the next two innings, I'll be really happy."

"It doesn't really matter if it is Ishant, or Harbhajan, or myself, or R.P. Singh, or Irfan Pathan."

"It is important we get him out early."

Not now for Tendulkar

PTI, Adelaide

How long will Sachin Tendulkar prolong his illustrious career may be a matter of speculation for experts and fans alike, but the champion batsman says he just "wants to live in the moment" and enjoy the game without thinking too much about retirement.

"To be honest, I haven't thought about it (retirement). Basically, I just want to go out and enjoy the game. I just want to live in the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Australian Open

REUTERS, Melbourne

Europe tightened its stranglehold on the Australian Open when America's sole survivors were blasted out of the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Venus Williams went the way of sister Serena, battered by a Serb baseliner, and James Blake was pulverized by Roger Federer.

Wimbledon champion Venus was swept aside 7-6 6-4 by fourth seed Ana Ivanovic and top seed Federer smashed Blake 7-5 7-6 6-4.

"She played well and hit a lot of good shots... so I give her a lot of credit," the Wimbledon champion said. "I have nobody to blame but myself."

Ivanovic will meet Daniela Hantuchova in the semis after the Slovak pummeled Pole Agnieszka Radwanska 6-2 6-2.

Federer reached his 15th straight grand slam semifinal in imperious fashion, smashing Blake off court in a slugging battle.

"He's such a great player and he hits great shots," Federer said graciously.

"It's just great being around in the last weekend of a grand slam. It's a pleasure to play against him."

Following Ivanovic's victory, men's third seed Novak Djokovic made it a super Wednesday for Serbia when he beat Spain's David Ferrer 6-0 6-3 7-5 to seal a spot in

the last four.

"This is just a start, hopefully I can go all the way. I have to start believing in myself a bit more," an elated Djokovic said.

It may take more than self-belief given that next up is the magnificent Federer bidding for his 13th grand slam title.

Venus had been looking to avenge Serena's quarterfinal loss to Serb Jelena Jankovic, but the result was the same as she floundered on a sun-drenched centre court.

The American simply committed too many errors and allowed her 20-year-old opponent to dominate from the baseline.

Ivanovic grabbed her opportunity with both hands.

"It's amazing, it was an amazing

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



Top-seeded Swiss Roger Federer goes airborne as he makes a forehand return to American James Blake during their quarterfinal of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Malik wants more

2nd ODI against Zimbabwe today

CRICINFO, undated

After Pakistan's convincing win over Zimbabwe in their series opener in Karachi, the two teams head to the unfamiliar territory of the Niaz Stadium in Hyderabad for the second ODI today to mark the first international match in ten years.

Although Pakistan's team management is believed to be keen on playing another bowler and using the wicketkeeper, Kamran Akmal, as an opener, the selectors are understandably reluctant to tinker

with a winning combination. Pakistan though will hope for an improved performance from their experienced pace trio -- Iftikhar Anjum, Sohail Tanvir and Samiullah Khan -- who between them managed only two, expensive wickets in Karachi.

Samiullah, on debut, went wicketless while conceding 60 runs, which was particularly disappointing, especially after such an impressive performance for the Patron's XI against Zimbabwe in the tour match before the series.

Pakistan were never seriously tested during Zimbabwe's run-chase at Karachi, and so their strategy of playing only three specialist

bowlers didn't come under scrutiny. They ended the match with the bit-parters Younis Khan and Misbahul Haq bowling the last eight overs between them.

The strength of Pakistan's batting -- all of whom, bar the unfortunate Salman Butt, went about their work ruthlessly in Karachi -- and Zimbabwe's weakness with the ball means it may not matter. Twenty-three fours and eight sixes in Karachi do not fully depict the intensity of their stranglehold over Zimbabwe's bowlers. But five half-centuries in the innings -- a world record -- meant Zimbabwe were under attack from the very first

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Air Commodore Golam Haider tees off to mark the inauguration of the Rangs Toshiba Golf Tournament at the Shaheen Golf Country Club in Patenga, Chittagong yesterday.