

Bangalore Open goes to Serena

AFP, Bangalore

Serena Williams won the 600,000-dollar WTA Bangalore Open on Sunday, giving the world number 11 her first title of the year on her maiden visit to India.

Williams defeated Patty Schnyder of Switzerland 7-5, 6-3 in a final lasting an hour and 25 minutes to pocket the winner's purse of 95,000 dollars and 275 points with her 29th career title.

The 12th-ranked Schnyder, who tasted defeat after winning three of her last four matches against Williams, took home 51,000 dollars and 190 points from India's richest tennis event.

"It was so nice being in India and winning the title made it even better," said the third-seeded American, who had beaten elder sister Venus in the semi-finals on Saturday.

"A week back I was not even sure I will be able to play, so to win my first title of the year makes it a very special visit."

Schnyder, seeded fourth, admitted Williams was too strong on the day.

"I tried my best but lost it in the second set," the Swiss said. "Hopefully we will meet again this year and I will be able to beat her."

"This was my first visit to India and I loved it. I am sure I will be back next year."

The final of the tier-two event, watched by 1,000 fans, was marked by erratic serving by both players.

They traded a break each in the sixth and seventh games before Williams broke once again in the 12th to wrap up the first set in 45 minutes.

The second set saw breaks in the first three games as both players struggled with their serves before Schnyder held her own in the fourth to lead 3-1.

Williams broke back in the sixth to level the scores at 3-3, broke again in the eighth to make it 5-3 and then held her own serve in the ninth to win the match.

Kolkata ticket row may end today

CRICINFO, undated

Top officials from Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies Entertainment, the Indian Premier League's (IPL) Kolkata franchise, and the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) will meet in the city on Tuesday to break the deadlock on hosting league matches at Eden Gardens, one of the world's biggest cricket venues.

"There is a meeting tomorrow, since all the top officials of the franchise will be present in Kolkata tomorrow. As we see it, all parties involved are looking to sort this out amicably," a representative of Red Chillies told Cricinfo on Monday.

The CAB, which holds the lease on Eden Gardens, and Red Chillies had failed to reach an agreement on using the stadium after a dissident section within the local association demanded a larger share of tickets from IPL. The IPL had decided to allot 20 per cent of tickets at every venue for the respective host association and the rest for the franchise, but a section within the CAB demanded more to meet the needs of over 100 affiliated units.

"Besides, you can't compare the situation in the other, smaller IPL venues in India with Eden Gardens, which can hold 90,000 spectators. Here, at 80 per cent, the franchise's share will be much more than that of other franchises at their host venues," said a representative from the opposing faction within the CAB.

The CAB faction initially demanded a 50 per cent share of tickets but is now willing to settle for "anything between 20 per cent and 50 per cent". But the problem is IPL officials and Red Chillies have refused to budge.

Tuesday's talks between the CAB and Red Chillies, on a day when the franchise will unveil its team colours in Kolkata, could lead to a breakthrough.

Abahani

FROM PAGE 17
(Zahoor Elahi 16, Rashedul 17 not out; Zia 43, Talha 3-16).
Result: Abahani won by 166 runs.
KALABAGAN: 162 all out in 47.2 overs (Hannan 32, Jamal Babu 28; Delwar 2-32, Younus 4-25, Saad 2-28).

SURJO TORUN: 167 for 6 in 45.2 overs (Bashir 66, Naem 45; Aslam 2-25, Murad 2-25).
Result: Surjo Torun won by four wickets.

PARTIX: 137 all out in 46.5 overs (Shaheen 23, Rashed 27; Latif 3-15, Nasir 3-21).
BKSP: 138 for 6 in 40.4 overs (Mushfiqur 34, Nasir 64 not out; Dipazzal 2-10, Rashed 3-16).
Result: BKSP won by four wickets.



Star American tennis player Serena Williams (R) and Swiss opponent Patty Schnyder pose with their respective trophies after Williams' victory in the women's singles final of the Bangalore Open on Sunday.

Moore hints at change

CRICINFO, undated

Peter Moore, the England coach, has said a change in the team is likely for the second Test in Wellington starting Thursday. England lost the first Test in Hamilton by 189 runs after they were bowled out for 110 chasing 300 on the fifth day.

"Not everyone has had the game they wanted to, and we have to look at putting out the best XI to win the game and level the series," Moore said. "You would be stupid not to go away and evaluate it."

Steve Harmison has been targeted by critics for his poor performance -- he took one wicket in the entire Test. In the second innings he bowled only four overs and went for 24 runs. Moore said he would discuss his performance with Harmison, who has taken 25 wickets at 39.08 from eight Tests since the beginning of 2007. "Steve has had a tough 12 months and has not performed to the level he would

like to. A lot of things with elite sports is about confidence.

"If you feel someone is not working hard enough and trying hard enough you are going to speak to them. If someone is putting themselves under too much pressure you try to take the pressure off them. We do it individually with different players. Everyone has to work hard to help each other under pressure situations."

Moore added the team was bitterly disappointed at not salvaging a draw in Hamilton. "But I feel very strongly that we can win the second Test. We have to start playing the cricket we know we can. We have to get ourselves sorted."

Stuart Broad is the favourite to replace Harmison if the change is made and he would also add some depth to the lower order, a crucial difference between the two teams in Hamilton. Daniel Vettori produced vital runs in both innings while England's tail offered little to the cause.

James Anderson, England's other option, got through 38 overs for Auckland in his State

Championship appearance and picked up two wickets. However, he is another swing bowler in the mould of Matthew Hoggard and Ryan Sidebottom so Broad's extra height would provide different challenge.

James Whitaker, one of England's two part-time selectors, has been asked to stay on the tour for a few extra days as the possible changes are discussed. He was due to fly home on Monday but has now travelled with the squad to Wellington.

"I think it just makes sense for James to stay out here," Moore said. "He's got no pressing commitments when he gets back -- so for him to change his flight and come to Wellington for a couple of days until the start of the Test match made sense."

"When the dust settles over the next couple of days we'll be having conversations, and it makes sense for the selector to be around and be involved in those conversations until we finalise that team for the next Test."

WORLD INDOOR C'SHIPS

Soboleva betters her own mark

AFP, Valencia

Russia's Yelena Soboleva improved on her own world 1500m record on Sunday as she clinched gold on the final day of the World Indoor Championships here.

Soboleva, who has always previously been the bridesmaid rather than the bride at major championships, ran 3min 57.71sec to better her old mark of 3min 58.05sec which she set in Moscow on February 10.

It was the 25-year-old blonde's first global or continental title.

Soboleva deliberately shared the pace with her fellow Russian Yuliya Fomenko in a bid to shake off the best of the rest of the world before flying to the front with one lap to go and accelerating away from her compatriot.

"I didn't expect to break the world record again although I knew it would be a fast race. Yuliya and I decided we would impose a fast pace from the start with the aim of clinching the gold and silver medal," said Soboleva.

"We would then see who was the strongest on the last lap."

Fomenko, the defending champion from two years ago in Moscow, held her form to take silver in 3:59.41, the second fastest time ever.

The Russian pair towed their nearest rivals to outstanding times as well. Ethiopia's Gelete Burka finished third with an African record of 3:59.75. Bahrain's Maryam Yusuf Jamal, the world champion outdoors last summer when she left Soboleva clutching the silver medal, came fourth in an Asian record 3:59.79.

Prior to Sunday only two women in history, including Soboleva, had gone under the benchmark of four minutes for the metric mile indoors.

Arguably the biggest upset of the championships was the victory of Tamsyn Lewis in the women's 800m, in which she went into the final the as the least-favoured of six women on the start line.

The Australian athlete had not run indoors before arriving in Valencia but took her chance

100m from the end in a tactical battle over four laps of the track to win in 2:02.57.

Ukraine's Tetiana Petlyuk took silver in 2:02.66 with Mozambique legend Maria Mutola settling for bronze in 2:02.97.

For Mutola, the 2000 Olympic 800m champion and triple outdoor champion in 1993, 2001 and 2003, it was a ninth indoor medal.

"It's such a great surprise to win. I was wondering what I was doing out there but then I knew I could win the race," said Lewis.

Croatia's reigning world outdoor high jump champion Blanka Vlasic was the only woman clear at 2.03m to clinch the gold medal in a high quality competition and then put the bar up to 2.09m.

Vlasic had three failures but two of her attempts were close enough to suggest she can clear that height outdoors.

"I came here thinking I could improve my personal best but I was a bit stressed because the other girls were going so well," said Vlasic, the very last competitor in action over the three days of the Championships.

United States' multi-event exponent Bryan Clay was within sight of the heptathlon world record going into the 1000m, the last event of the seven disciplines.

However, halfway into the race, Clay started to struggled from the effort of the previous six events and settled for plodding around the final two laps to secure gold in a 2008 world best of 6371 points.

A stunning gun-to-tape run in the men's 800m by Sudanese teenager Abubaker Kaki gave his troubled country their first world indoor gold in an outstanding 1:44.81, the fifth fastest time ever.

"My coach told me to go to the front and run as fast as I could. Those were easy tactics to follow," said the 18-year-old Kaki.

British triple jumper Phillips Idowu, sporting dyed bright red hair, added the world indoor title to the European crown he notched up last winter when he bounded out to a new Commonwealth record of 17.75m.

Russia's Olesya Zykina was the only double gold medallist of the Championships.

Zykina just held off her fast-finishing compatriot Natalya Nazarova to take the individual women's 400m gold medal in a

2008 best time of 51.09, with Nazarova finishing one-hundredth in arrears

The pair then recovered sufficiently and, just under two hours later, they helped Russia to their eighth consecutive 4x400m relay title in 3:28.17 with Zykina running the anchor leg.

New Zealand's Valerie Vili produced a massive first round heave of 20.19m to win the women's shot put, which increased her own Oceania record.

It was also New Zealand's first world indoor title and added to the outdoor accolade Vili won last summer.

2nd IPL auction

FROM PAGE 17

The Mohali coach Tom Moody was cautious ahead of the auction. "There are only a few (franchises) that have got a few pennies left in the bank so we will see what happens," Moody told AFP.

Some of the franchises have made signings since the auction on February 20; these are largely junior players and those from the catchment areas.

INTERIM SIGNINGS

Delhi have drafted in Yo Mahesh, Shikhar Dhawan, Mithun Manhas, Rajat Bhatia and Mayank Tehlan.

Bangalore have enlisted the services of Sunil Joshi, Balachandra Akhil, R Vinay Kumar, Bharat Chipli, J Arun Kumar, KP Appanna, Devraj Patel.

Chennai have signed up Goa's Shadab Jakati, Uttar Pradesh's Sudeep Tyagi, R Ashwin, Srikanth Anirudha and S Badrinath.

Mumbai have taken on the Baroda wicketkeeper, Pinal Shah, along with Mumbai Ranji players Abhishek Nayar and Ajinkya Rahane and Maharashtra's Yogesh Takawale.

Hyderabad have roped in Sanjay Bangar, Venugopal Rao, N Arjun Yadav, D Ravi Teja, Pragyan Ojha, D Kalyankrishna, P Vijay Kumar, M Sarvesh and Orissa's Halahar Das.

Mohali have signed up VRV Singh and two U-22 players in Karan Goel and Uday Kaul.

Jaipur have brought in Pankaj Singh and Mumbai's U-22 player Anup Revandkar.

JFA Cup finals start today

RU CORRESPONDENT

The final round of the 4th JFA Cup Under-15 Football Tournament kicks off at the Rajshahi Stadium today. BKSP face Khulna in the inaugural match at 2.30 pm while Cox's Bazar meet Moulovi Bazar in the day's second game at the same venue at 4.15pm.

Rajshahi Zela kriya Sangstha is hosting the 10-team finals with the financial assistance of the Japan Football Association (JFA), who are patronising the meet in an effort to unearth the budding talents.

The other six teams who advanced into the final round are Narayanganj, Dinaipur, Kustia, Bhola, Dhaka and host Rajshahi. Earlier, a total of 63 teams participated in the qualifying rounds at eight different venues across the country.

Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner Muhammad Hafizur Rahman will inaugurate the final round where the ten teams split into two groups will play in the round robin league. Top two finishers from each group will play in the cross-cross semifinals. The final is slated for March 24.

Two matches will be held every day.

Nat'l handball

SPORTS REPORTER

The semifinal line-ups of the Exim Bank 18th National Men's Handball Championships were completed yesterday.

Bangladesh Rifles, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Ansar and Rajshahi won their respective matches to emerge group champions to confirm their places in the last four at the outer stadium handball ground.

Police will play Ansars in the first semifinal at 3pm today while Rifles take on Rajshahi at 4:10pm in the second match.

In the last group matches, Rifles outplayed Faridpur 31-4, Rajshahi beat Dhaka 27-20, Ansar defeated Chapinawabganj 34-18 and Police beat Chittagong 30-16 in the morning session while Rifles secured massive 38-11 victory over Nature, Ansar defeated Chittagong Metropolitan team 30-14 and Police beat Jessore 37-11 in the afternoon session.

Rumi's death anniversary today

UNB, Dhaka

Today is the fifth death anniversary of renowned sports journalist and freedom fighter Masud Ahmed Rumi.

On the occasion, Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) has arranged Qurankhani and milad mahfil at the association's office at 2:30 pm to seek diving blessings for the salvation of the departed soul of Rumi, a former president of BSJA.

The BSJA, in a press release, requested all its members and well-wishers to attend the milad mahfil.

Bhaji asked not to talk to media

CRICINFO, undated

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has gagged Harbhajan Singh from speaking to the media, following complaints from Cricket Australia (CA) over his alleged remarks about Matthew Hayden and Adam Gilchrist.

The BCCI confirmed receiving a letter from CA regarding the same.

"We have asked him not to speak to the media," Niranjan Shah, the board secretary, said. "It's time to move on. We don't want any more controversy."

CA took objection to Harbhajan's recent outburst, when he allegedly labelled the Australian team "arrogant", called Hayden a "big liar" and said Gilchrist was "not a saint". There are also reports in the Australian media that the ICC has taken cognisance of Harbhajan's remarks, which he later denied saying.

Harbhajan was largely booed by the crowds after the Andrew Symonds episode in the Sydney Test. During the first final of the CB Series in Sydney, a few spectators alleged Harbhajan gestured and spat at them but Jeff Crowe, the match referee, viewed the evidence and felt there was no need to take action against him.

It's cricket

FROM PAGE 17

being heaped on him by former captains from India and Australia like Steve Waugh, Adam Gilchrist, Kim Hughes, Ajit Wadekar and Dilip Vengsarkar.

While Waugh said a team was always a reflection of its captain, Gilchrist gave full marks to Dhoni and Kim Hughes praised India saying "the sleeping giant (India) has awoken".

On Navjot Singh Sidhu's reported statement that Dhoni should also be handed over the Test captaincy, the Ranchi player said, "no comments".

Hamburg lose ground

INTERNET, Hamburg



SV Hamburg missed the chance to go second in the Bundesliga Sunday after playing out a scoreless draw away to Nuremberg while Bayer Leverkusen cemented their grip on fourth spot with a 2-0 defeat of Hanover 96. Hamburg went into the game against relegation-threatened Nuremberg nine points adrift of leaders Bayern Munich, 2-0 winners over Karlsruhe 2-0 Saturday, and just two behind second-placed Werder Bremen, who crashed to a 6-3 defeat at champions VfB Stuttgart.

A win would have seen the gap to Bayern narrowed to six points but, instead, the visitors should have found themselves a goal down two minutes before half-time when

Collin Benjamin unnecessarily brought down Peer Kluge in the area.

Luckily for Huub Stevens' side, Zvezdan Misimovic's weak spot kick was easily saved by Hamburg goalkeeper Frank Rost.

Chances were also at a premium in the second half with David Jarolim hitting the woodwork for Hamburg before Marco Engelhardt wasted Nuremberg's best chance of the period on 71 minutes, blasting his shot over from the edge of the area.

It was disappointing to go in at half-time at 0-0 especially after being awarded a penalty," said new Nuremberg coach Thomas von Heesen, who is still in search of his first win in charge of the Bavarian club.

Leverkusen moved within a point of third spot as goals from Theofanis Gekas and Tranquillo Barnetta helped secure a 2-0 defeat of Hanover in the day's other game.

Hanover were lucky not to concede a penalty after just three

minutes when Gekas' shot clearly came off the arm of Steven Cherundolo but the Greek international eventually put Leverkusen in front on the half-hour mark with a sublime chip.

Barnetta made it 2-0 with a clinical finish nine minutes later with Gekas involved in the build-up.

Michael Skibbe's side continued their domination in the second half with Bernd Schneider setting up Barnetta for what would have been the Swiss international's second of the game but Hanover goalkeeper Robert Enke saved well.

A weakly-hit back pass by Arturo Vidal almost gifted Hanover a way back into the match with just over 20 minutes remaining but substitute Jan Arnold Bruggink skewed his shot narrowly wide.

The weekend results mean Bayern continue to head the standings on 50 points, with Werder on 43 and Hamburg on 42, one clear of Leverkusen.

No toasts yet for Cardiff

AFP, Middlesbrough

Cardiff manager Dave Jones insisted he wouldn't be breaking out the champagne after his troubled Championship club booked a place in the FA Cup semifinals.

The Welsh team reached the last four for the first time since 1927 - when they became the only club from outside England to win the FA Cup - thanks to an impressive 2-0 victory at Middlesbrough on Sunday.

First half goals from Peter Whittingham and Roger Johnson were enough to see off their Premier League opponents.

But Cardiff's glory could be short-lived. They face a trip to the High Court this week, with the Bluebirds' existence under threat over a 24 million pounds debt, so Jones won't be getting carried away.

"Someone asked for champagne - for what? We have just got through to the next round," Jones said. "We have not done anything yet. All we have done is get through to the semifinals of the FA Cup."

"We haven't won it, we have not got to the final and we have got to get prepared. Why would we be drinking champagne?" Jones was adamant the club's

off-the-pitch problems hadn't been a distraction, but he wants the issues resolved as soon as possible.

"All I can do is do what I am paid to do, which is the football side, and leave the people who know what they are doing to sort the court case out this week," he said.

"It hasn't had a bearing on us, except that we haven't been able to bring players in. That's the only bearing it has had."

"Yes, there are certain things we would have liked during the season, but we couldn't do it until everything was sorted out."

Middlesbrough were woeful and got exactly what they deserved for a shockingly lacklustre display.

Whittingham opened the scoring in the ninth minute when he curled home a sublime finish after Stephen McPhail deflected the ball to him with his arm.

If Middlesbrough had cause for complaint about that goal they couldn't argue about Johnson's effort in the 23rd minute.

Whittingham turned provider this time as he lifted a free-kick to the far post, where Johnson got in front of Emanuel Pogatzetz and scored with a fine diving header.

"It's a huge disappointment for us. We know what an opportunity it was to win something," Middlesbrough manager Gareth Southgate said.

"But that is the Cup and that is why I always say you are judged as a

team by what you do in the league because the Cup can go any way for you."

"We have had games here that we should have been out of competitions and we have gone all the way to the final."

"We got what we deserved. It's what happens on the day and we didn't deliver."

No need

FROM PAGE 17

Ranatunga echoed those sentiments, saying the he was not "too much worried" about the team's performance in Australia.

"We should move on and have the team ready for the next World Cup," said Ranatunga, captain of the 1996 World Cup-winning squad.

The next World Cup will be jointly hosted by India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in 2011.

India fail

FROM PAGE 17

Indian kids are the most gifted hockey players in the world.

"We just need to get the right coaches even if they are from abroad and provide the right infrastructure to youngsters."

Australian hockey wizard Ric Charlesworth, who was hired by India last year to identify young talent, is being tipped to take over as national coach.



Members of Great Britain team celebrate after defeating India in their final match of the World Hockey Olympic qualifying tournament in Santiago on Sunday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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