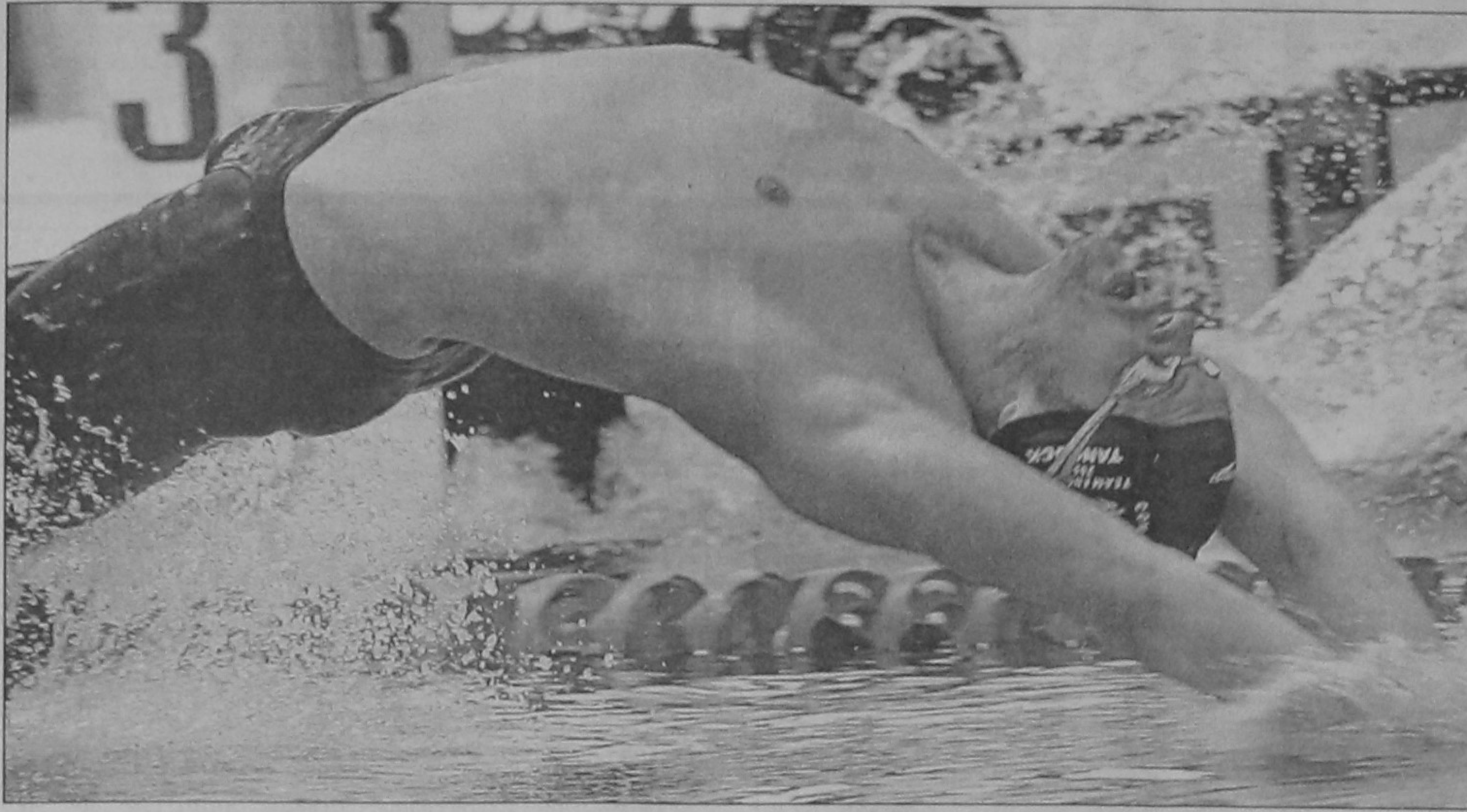


Liam breaks 50m backstroke WR

British swimmer Liam Tancock broke the 50 metres backstroke world record of 24.47 seconds at the British Olympic trials in Sheffield here on Wednesday.



An AFP file of British swimmer Liam Tancock who on Wednesday broke the 50 metres backstroke world at the British Olympic trials in Sheffield.

Tancock broke the old mark of 24.80sec set by Germany's Thomas Rupprath, which he set in Barcelona on July 27 2003.

Akhtar claims he received bribe offers

Banned fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar claims he was offered cash to underperform in matches in South Africa and India, but he refused to take part in any match-fixing.

"I was offered billions of rupees in betting. There was a briefcase full of money placed on the table before me in Johannesburg," Akhtar said in television interviews broadcast late on Wednesday.

"I was never tempted yet I am punished for doing nothing wrong," he said, alleging a link between his ban this week and the unspecified bribe offers.

"I don't want to sensationalise things, but by saying this I want to let the people know how much I love to play for my country and I have never tried to damage the name of my country," he said in the interviews.

"Even in India I was offered money to under-perform and on various other occasions but I told the people who offered me money to run away or I will let loose," said Akhtar.

"I never tried to sell cricket or my country's name. I was never tempted by money. I have played my cricket clean but the ban has hurt me badly."

Akhtar did not specify when he was offered the massive bribes.

Biman above

FROM PAGE 17 three sixes and two boundaries in his innings. But Surjo Torun, already confirmed of a Super League place, were restricted to 171-7 in 30 overs after left-arm paceman Kamrul Islam took three for 39.

Lorgat set for ICC job

Malcolm Speed, who steps down from the position after this year's ICC annual conference, which will take place between June 29 and July 4.

The ICC has been looking at an early resolution to the search for its next CEO after its earlier choice Imtiaz Patel, also from South Africa, declared on Sunday that he chartered accountant -- whose roots, like Patel's, are in India -- and formerly a senior partner in Ernst & Young, he is currently on the board of Kapela Investments, a private venture he set up last year with five other associates.

Dave Richardson, the former South Africa wicketkeeper and ICC's general manager, was the other significant candidate for the job after Patel pulled out. IS Bindra, the former BCCI president and a third name of note on the ICC's shortlist, has already been appointed the ICC's principal advisor.

AFP adds, Lorgat met ICC president Ray Mali and Morgan in Cape Town and said he expected an announcement from the world body by the weekend.

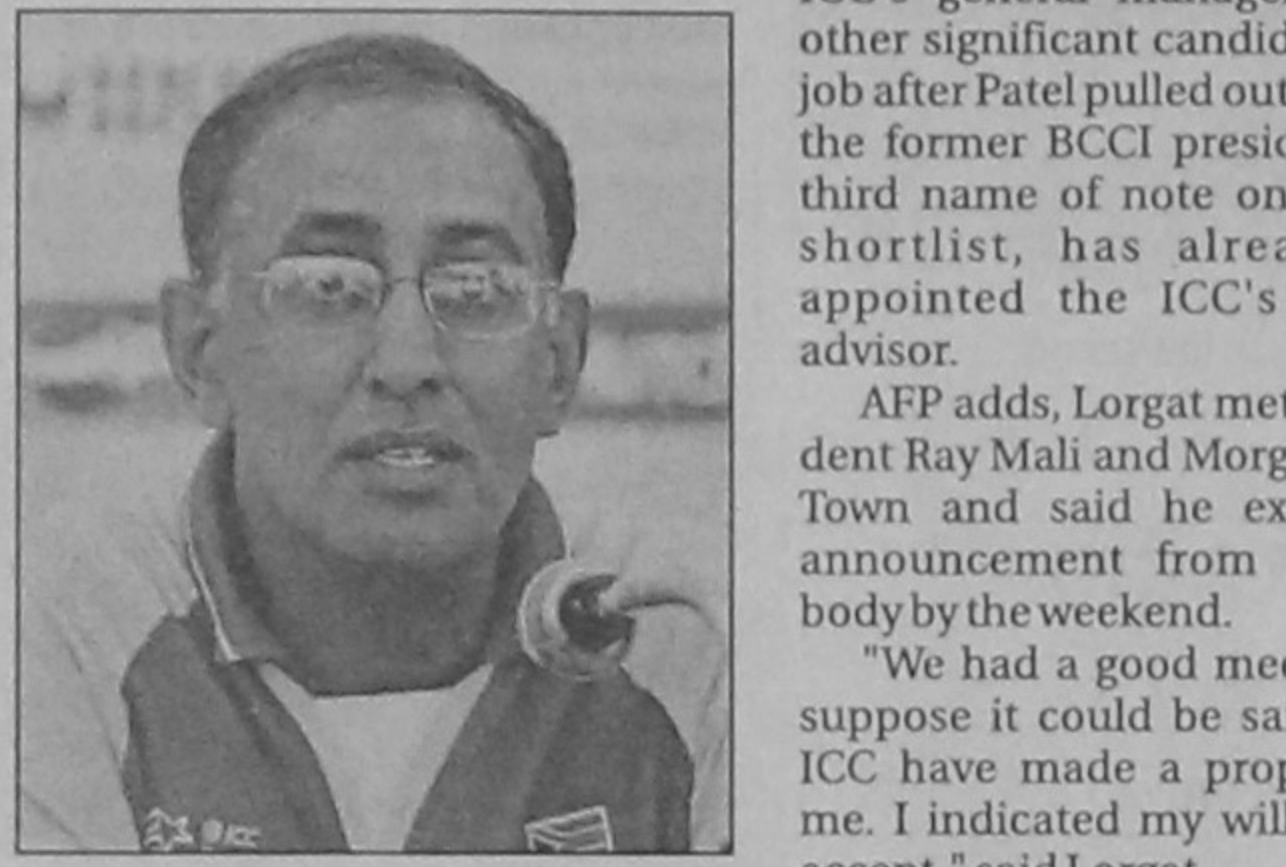
"We had a good meeting and I suppose it could be said that the ICC have made a proposition to me. I indicated my willingness to accept," said Lorgat.

He also served as treasurer of the United Cricket Board of South Africa before he was appointed convenor of selectors in 2004.

Lorgat said the ICC "needs to complete the process of appointing the next chief executive" but said he expected an announcement before the weekend.

"It is certainly a very exciting prospect for me," he added.

Lorgat will take over from Haroon Lorgat, who is still some way away: Morgan will now report to the recruitment committee, which will have to agree on the preferred candidate and then make a recommendation to the ICC executive board to confirm the appointment as early as possible.



had withdrawn interest in the job. Lorgat, who figured on the ICC's original shortlist of six, had told Cricinfo on Monday that he would consider any such offer as "a great honour".

Lorgat, 47, headed CSA's selection committee for three years till the 2007 World Cup. A qualified

same view that match-fixing is a cancer which damages the integrity of football, the teams and ultimately the players," said Bin Hammam.

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"AFC will take all possible measures to fight against such elements who are corrupting the game. We will pursue this matter to its logical end and concentrate our energies on finding out the truth."

Home United won Wednesday night's game 2-1. Local reports said Argentinians Marcos Aguirre and Luciano Theiler were approached by an unidentified man at the Royal

Hotel where the Maldives team was staying. They declined his offers to throw the match and reported the matter to team officials who in turn informed the FAS.

"We take a serious view of corruption and remain committed to stamping out this menace," said FAS general secretary Winston Lee.

Corruption has long blighted football in Asia, particularly in Vietnam and China. Earlier this year, seven players from Singapore league side Liaoning Guangyuan were charged with alleged match-fixing.

It followed club manager Wang Xin being suspended from all football activities after being charged with the same offence. Liaoning have since been thrown out of the S-League.

Dhumketu's 2nd win in a row

Dhumketu recorded a hard-fought 69-60 in against Bangladesh Police in yesterday's Independence Day Basketball Tournament at the Dhanmondi basketball gymnasium.

The winners, who beat Eagles Club 85-46 on the previous day, led 28-26 at the break. Toufik topscored with 16 and Pintu 10 for Dhumketu.

Malik can now travel

Disgraced former Pakistan captain Salim Malik, serving a life ban for alleged match-fixing, has got some reprieve after his name was removed from the exit control list which prevented him from travelling abroad.

Malik was banned by the Justice Malik Qayyum Commission for his alleged involvement in match-fixing eight years ago.

He said with the coming to power of a new government, he was hoping for more reprieve from the stigma attached to his name.

"I am hoping that I can get back to cricket and start my own cricket academy in Pakistan. I would also like to play some domestic cricket," the former skipper said.

Malik was one of several Test captains from different countries to be banned for life when the match fixing scandal broke out in the late nineties.

Justice Qayyum, who is now attorney general of Pakistan, had headed a 18-month long inquiry into the involvement of some Pakistan players in match fixing and betting and then recommended a life ban for Malik and fines on some other senior players.

All the other indicted players went on to continue playing for Pakistan but Malik's career ended even though he maintains his innocence.

"It has been one of the most difficult periods of my life and I and my family have been severely stigmatised. Hopefully now things will change and my name will be cleared because I still maintain I am innocent," Malik said.

National Sports

FROM PAGE 17 (organisers). Each award carries gold medal, cash prize of Tk 20,000 and a certificate.

A total of 178 sports personalities so far received national sports awards introduced in 1976.

Kutub new BOA

FROM PAGE 17 secretary-general informed that a draft constitution has already been formed. "We will soon hold a seminar and then send it to the IOC for approval," Kutub added.

'PCB should be sacked'

Former captain Imran Khan called Thursday on the new Pakistani government to disband the country's cricket board after it banned fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar for five years.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday banned Akhtar for repeatedly breaching the players' code of conduct, culminating in a public outburst in January against the board for not giving him a central contract.

"The tragic incident of banning Akhtar reflects how undemocratically cricket is run in this country and I think this is an ideal time for the new government to fix it," Imran told AFP.

The PCB's patron is Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, who is also responsible for selecting the chief of the board, currently Nasim Ashraf.

"Musharraf has made Pakistan a banana republic and his appointed chairman of the PCB has made the

cricket board a sort of banana republic," said Imran, who led Pakistan to their only World Cup title in 1992.

"Pakistan cricket is unique in the sense that the President of Pakistan appoints the cricket chief. Since there is legitimacy in other countries they don't have such problems," he added.

"The cricket chief is involved in everything from selection to touring, but since he has no legitimacy he cannot solve problems. So I demand the new government install a democratically-elected cricket chief as soon as possible."

Akhtar was hauled up before a PCB disciplinary committee for criticising its policies following his removal from a list of 15 players awarded central contracts in January this year, the latest in a string of discipline problems.

In deciding on the punishment, the board cited the fact that Akhtar was on two years' probation following an earlier ban for hitting teammate Mohammad Asif with a bat in October.

Imran said the ban was unjust. "Tell me how many players in world cricket have been banned for five years on discipline charges," Imran said. "Previous incidents of indiscipline should have been dealt with at the time instead of being allowed to accumulate."

Imran said Akhtar has a lot to offer to Pakistan cricket. "A fit Akhtar is still head and shoulders above other Pakistani bowlers and he still has a lot of cricket left in him if he keeps himself fit," said Imran, who now heads his political party, Tehrik-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice).

The PCB chairman however expressed his concern on Thursday at the "politicisation" of Shoaib's ban in Pakistan.

Ashraf said Senate and National Assembly members who were questioning the suspension should respect the decision of the PCB.

"People should accept this decision and keep it away from politics," he told Pakistan television on Thursday.

"The board has been very lenient with Shoaib and he has tried to reform him but he has refused to change his ways."

Media concern over IPL

too strict and raise questions about press freedom," Barry Parker, AFP's South Asia bureau chief, told Cricinfo. "The present terms and conditions don't allow us to cover the event."

Several hours after the accreditation forms were posted online, the IPL indicated it was open to negotiations. "We don't feel the rules are stringent in any way, as we are only protecting our rights," said IS Bindra, a member of the IPL's governing council. "We are treating the issue of photographs just as we would in the case of TV production. However, we are ready to discuss the issue with all parties involved to reach an amicable solution," he said. "The production is ours. We are not being rigid here and saying that only what we say is right. Of course, we will ensure that things don't lead to a situation where media outlets decide to boycott the event."

Asked why websites would be denied access to the pictures, Bindra said: "We have not allowed online usage only because we have sold the portal rights of the event to a respected company based in North America for 50 million dollars. We can't disclose the company's name at the moment as they are in the process of getting listed."

Andrew Moger, a spokesman for the News Media Coalition, which includes some of the world's major news and photograph agencies, said the decision would have an enormous impact on media groups with websites and news agencies supplying pictures around the world. "As feared, the media accreditation terms for the Indian Premier League represent some of the most restrictive and burdensome access arrangements ever seen by the news media worldwide."

Moger worked for the news agencies, including Reuters, AFP and AP, and the photo distributor Getty Images, when they had similar concerns over image rights in the accreditation guidelines set by Cricket Australia for the 2007-08 summer. There were fears media groups would have to pay for access and the body wanted to maintain rights over photographs taken in the stadiums. However, limits over the number of reports sent from the ground remained in place.

The demands resulted in News Limited journalists being locked out for day one of the first Test against Sri Lanka, while the agency boycott ended a week later when Muttiah Muralidaran was in danger of breaking Shane Warne's then world record.

World number two Rafael Nadal rallied for a three-set victory Wednesday over James Blake to book his semifinal berth at the ATP and WTA Sony Ericsson Open.

Nadal, seeded second behind world number one Roger Federer, defeated Blake 3-6, 6-3, 6-1 as he moved a step closer to his first title of 2008.

It was the Spaniard's second victory over Blake in as many starts, following his quarterfinal win over the American at Indian Wells.

Prior to that, Blake had won the first three career meetings between the two.

Nadal earned the break he needed in the third game of the third set, and held on to close out the match in 1hr 55min.

Nadal said the key to his changing fortune against Blake was a more aggressive, albeit riskier, stance.

"I think just before I was running a lot, two meters behind the line," he said. "I think right now I'm playing a little bit more aggressive. I can lose, but I think it's the only way to try to win."

In the semifinals, Nadal will face Czech 10th seed Tomas Berdych, who eliminated Russian Igor Andreev 6-4, 6-4 in the day's other men's quarterfinal.

In women's action fourth-seeded Serbian Jelena Jankovic reached the semifinals when Russia's Elena Dementieva retired while trailing in the second-set of their quarterfinal clash.

Jankovic led 6-1, 3-1 when Dementieva, battling a back injury for which she received treatment after the first set, decided she couldn't continue because of pain in her lower back.

"I think I played pretty good tennis, especially in the first set," Jankovic said. "I was really dictating the points."

"It was my game overall that was out there on the court, and I was really happy with that. Unfortunately she stopped the match in the middle of the second set and there's nothing I could do."

Jankovic, who had saved five match points in her battling second-round victory over Sweden's Sofia Arvidsson, booked a semifinal matchup with Vera Zvonareva, who beat Russian compatriot Dinara Safina 7-5, 6-4.

Jankovic's abbreviated quarterfinal echoed her experience at Indian Wells, where she reached the semifinals when American Lindsay Davenport retired from their contest with a back injury. The Serbian will make her fourth semifinal appearance of the year but is still seeking to make her first final of 2008, having lost in the final four at the Australian Open, Dubai and Indian Wells.

'Match-fixing is a cancer'

Asian Football Confederation chief Mohamed bin Hammam on Thursday called match-fixing a "cancer" that is destroying the game after an illegal approach to players in Singapore.

His comments follow allegations that two players of Maldives side Victory SC were approached on Tuesday night to throw their AFC Cup match here against Singapore's Home United.

Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau and the AFC are now investigating after being alerted by the Football Association of Singapore (FAS).

"The FAS and AFC share the

same view that match-fixing is a cancer which damages the integrity of football, the teams and ultimately the players," said Bin Hammam.

"Bribery and match-fixing by illegal betting syndicates are scourges which are destroying the game and AFC is committed to eradicating them and keeping Asian football clean."

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'My demotion wasn't wrong'

Spain, which West Indies need to win to level the contest. The strong response was sparked by Mahela Jayawardene, the Sri Lanka captain, who said Gayle took a "negative path" in the first Test.

"It played into our hands," Jayawardene said. "Once he comes there [at No. 6] he is one of our top players and he won't have the batting depth to bat with towards the latter part of their innings. He's got to bat with his tailenders and if we keep him quiet we can go with the other guys."

Gayle said Jayawardene's view was "wrong". "If you check other international teams they have done it before and no one said anything about it," Gayle said. "Herschelle Gibbs used to open the batting and batted in the middle

for a year or two. We West Indians always come down hard on ourselves."

Dwayne Bravo was promoted into Gayle's spot and made 83 in the second innings in Guyana and the captain said it was a team decision for him to bat lower. "I don't just come up and say, 'I am going to do that'. I ask questions, 'players what do you think?', 'what's the best solution for the team?' If they do agree with it then I will go with it."

Gayle said no decision had been made on where he would bat at Queen's Park Oval from Thursday, but Sri Lanka expect him to return to opening. "I don't think he will make the same mistake in this Test," Jayawardene said, "but we will adjust ourselves to whatever they come up with."

India Steyn-gunned

FROM PAGE 17 SCOREBOARD Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the second Test between India and South Africa at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Motera, Ahmedabad on Thursday: INDIA: First innings Jaffer c Smith b Ntini 9 Schwab b Steyn 6 Dravid b Steyn 3 Laxman b Ntini 3 Ganguly b Ntini 0 Smith c Boucher b Morkel 14 Pathan not out 21 Kumble b Morkel 0 Harbhajan lbw b Steyn 1

RP Singh c Smith b Steyn 0 Sreesanth b Steyn 0 Extras: (b-4, lb-11, nb-2, w-2) 19 Total: (All out in 20 overs) 76 Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-24, 3-30, 4-30, 5-53, 6-55, 7-55, 8-56, 9-76 Bowler O M R W INDIA: First innings Jaffer c Smith b Ntini 9 Schwab b Steyn 6 Dravid b Steyn 3 Laxman b Ntini 3 Ganguly b Ntini 0 Smith c Boucher b Morkel 14 Pathan not out 21 Kumble b Morkel 0 Harbhajan lbw b Steyn 1

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. A crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 21 mins and a Cryptoquip section at the bottom.