

Pup to miss first Test

AFP, Sydney

Australian vice captain Michael Clarke will miss the first Test against the West Indies after delaying his departure to the Caribbean for family reasons, the player and officials said Friday.

Cricket Australia said Clarke, also known as Pup, will arrive in Kingston, Jamaica on May 23 -- the second day of the first Test -- after staying in Australia to be with his fiancee following the death of her father.

"I will miss the first Test and am sure the boys will serve Australia well," Clarke said in a statement, noting that he would be "ready to go" for the second Test in Antigua.

Cricket Australia's Michael Brown said: "I've spoken with Michael and he has Cricket Australia's absolute support. During this difficult time it is appropriate he spends a little more time with his fiancee's family in advance of leaving for the West Indies."

Brown said that Brad Hodge, who was added to the squad to replace the batsman, would be released from duties if he was not selected for the first Test.

Australia will play the first Test in the West Indies in Jamaica starting May 22, moving to Antigua for the second from May 30 and the final Test in Barbados on June 12.

The tour will also include one Twenty20 international and five one-dayers.

Kumble on Dravid's side

CRICINFO, undated

Anil Kumble has firmly backed Rahul Dravid, the captain of the Bangalore Royal Challengers, and said it was time "people who matter" understand what sports is all about.

Kumble's statement comes in the wake of the comments made by Vijay Mallya, the liquor baron who owns the franchise, where he defended his decision to sack Charu Sharma, the CEO, and also said his biggest mistake was to trust Dravid on matters of team selection.

"What's important though, is that at this time, you need all the support and backing you can get," Kumble wrote in his column for Hindustan Times. "You need the people around you, the people who matter, to understand what sports is all about, to realise that no one goes out there to lose."

"What's unfortunate is that, invariably, everyone starts pointing fingers at the captain. So it stands all the more to reason that people within the camp then stand up and say 'we believe in you and your team'. That's what's most important in this kind of situation. I do understand that the IPL is different and there is a corporate look and feel to the whole concept. But having said that, at the end of the day, it is a cricket match -- one that a cricketer does not want to lose."

Kumble admitted that his side had fallen too far back in the tournament -- after losing seven of their first nine games -- but felt there was still an opportunity to get back the winning feeling. "As players, we go through various ups and downs in our careers, there are phases when nothing one does is wrong and there are others where the same things that come so naturally to you seem like alien concepts," he wrote.

Mishra sinks

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hattrick, the second of the IPL.

Mishra's calm under pressure ensured the calculated assault from Gambhir and Dhawan earlier in the innings was not in vain. They lost Sehwag in the first over, slinging a short and wide ball to third man, and it wasn't until the fourth over, when Gambhir pulled RPL for consecutive sixes over midwicket that the innings finally gained momentum.

Gambhir went past 400 runs in the tournament during his 79 and he and Dhawan accelerated between overs 10 and 14 -- a period during which Delhi scored 64. Dhawan came into his own once the support bowlers -- Sarvesh Kumar and Styris -- operated, punishing anything full on the pads. He even reverse-swept Rao for four, and hit Afridi out of the attack with consecutive boundaries in an over that went for 18.

Delhi missed powerful finishers in previous matches but today the Sri Lankans -- Farveez Maharoof and Dilshan -- found the boundary several times to take them close to 200. That proved crucial in the end and Delhi could take heart from the fact that the architects of the victory were largely the local players and not the overseas recruits.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DELHI DAREDEVILS: 194 for 4 in 20 overs (Gambhir 79, Dhawan 68 not out, Maharoof 19, Dilshan 16, Tiwary 4 not out; Vijaykumar 1-24, Ojha 2-19)

DECCAN CHARGERS: 182 for 9 in 20 overs (Gilchrist 14, Afridi 33, Gibbs 22, Sharma 35, Styris 29, Rao 34, Teja 9, RP Singh 1; McGrath 2-42, Maharoof 2-39, Mishra 5-17)

Result: Delhi Daredevils won by 12 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Amit Mishra.

Umpires: BG Jerling (South Africa) and GA Pratapkumar

Toss: Deccan Chargers.

Federer in semis

Tennis

AFP, Hamburg

Defending champion Roger Federer booked his place in the semifinals of the Hamburg Masters Series with a straight sets win over Fernando Verdasco on Friday.

World number one Federer looked very comfortable as he beat the Spaniard 6-3, 6-3 in 80 minutes and will face either unseeded local hero Nicolas Kiefer or Italy's Andreas Seppi in Saturday's semifinal.

Verdasco, 28th in the world, had removed fifth-seed David Ferrer and tenth-seeded Russian Mikhail Youzhny in previous rounds but a foot injury in the second set compromised his bid to oust his Swiss opponent.

"It was quite a tough match, he's a very talented player who is capable of beating any player on any surface, I had to work hard," said Federer.

"I thought he would come out and go for aces, but he hit some great shots off his back-hand."

Federer has won four of the last six tournaments in Hamburg and beat left-handed clay-court king Rafael Nadal in last year's final.

The Swiss star admitted it was good experience to face left-handed Verdasco, especially if he plays Nadal again in Sunday's final.

"It's always good to face left-

handed players, especially with Roland Garros coming up," he said.

"If you face a left-hander in

Paris it always helps if you have faced one a week ago rather than five months before."

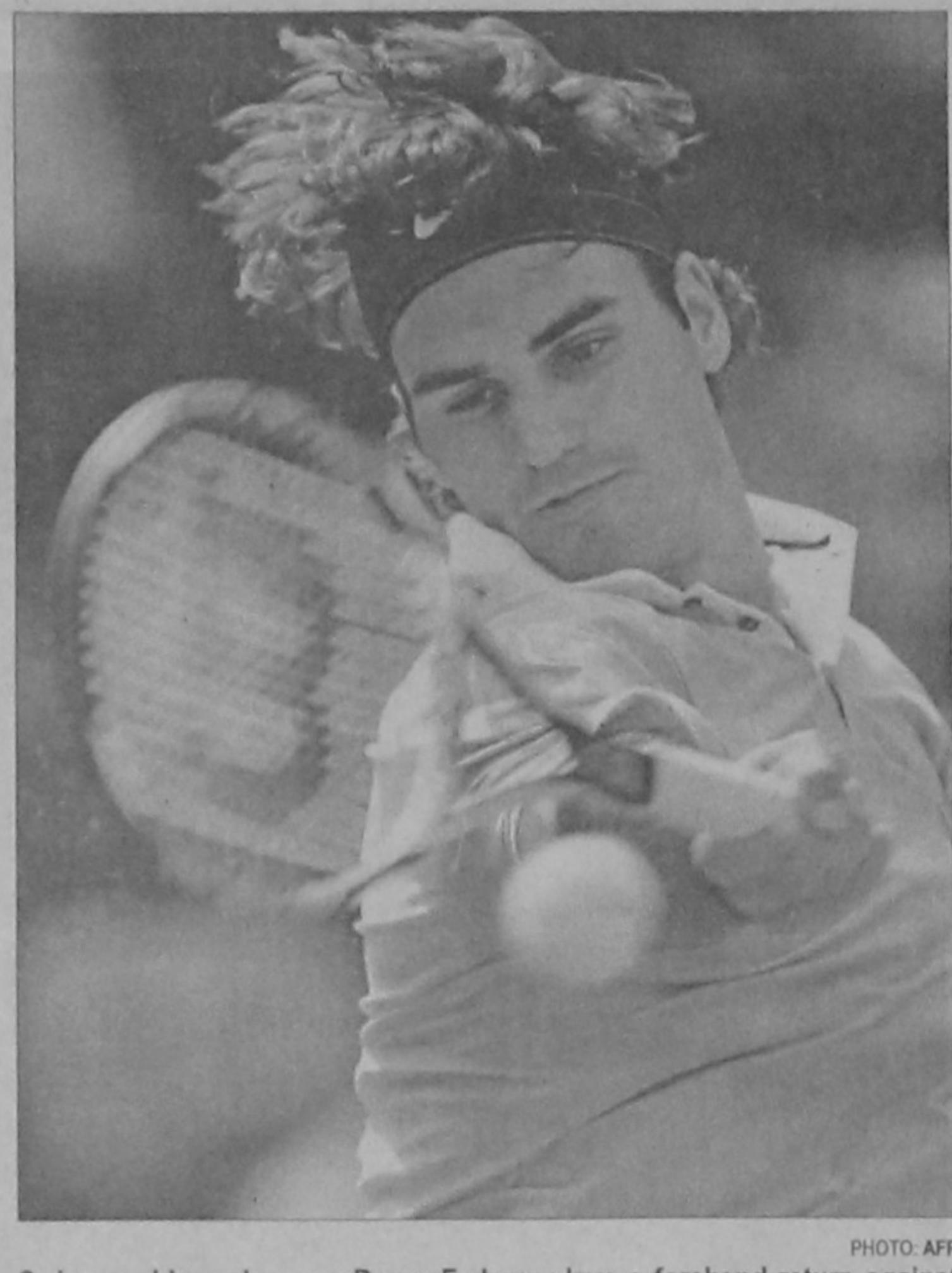


PHOTO: AFP

Swiss world number one Roger Federer plays a forehand return against Spaniard Fernando Verdasco during the quarterfinal of the Hamburg Masters tennis tournament on Friday.

Time to rise for WI: Dyson

AFP, St John's

West Indies coach John Dyson believes his team's daunting, imminent challenge against Australia could be the making of his Caribbean team.

The Windies face the world champions in the first of three Tests in Jamaica from May 22 with Dyson predicting some of his younger players will seize their opportunity against Ricky Ponting's men.

"This is the time for our guys to play their best cricket. This is a really great opportunity for them. As I look at the main players it's a precarious 104 for five to a comparatively respectable 208 for six."

A boundary short of his first Test century against England he then missed a straight ball from Money Paneser and was bowled.

While Paneser and the England team celebrated without restraint, McCullum stood for a minute with his head bowed before walking slowly back to the pavilion.

"I have been telling them this is the time to really deliver and be counted, and what better occasion than against the best side in the world and in front of your supporters on home turf. If everyone delivers the team will surely benefit."

The West Indies have been training here since Monday and according to Dyson, the players have worked hard on getting ready for the three Tests, five ODIs and one Twenty20 international.

Brendon shifts talent

Cricket

REUTERS, London

Brendon McCullum transported the special skills of limited overs cricket to the spiritual home of the game on Thursday in a bittersweet day for the New Zealand wicketkeeper.

McCullum rescued New Zealand's firstinnings on the opening day of the first Test against England at Lord's with a run-a-ball 97, taking the visitors from a precarious 104 for five to a comparatively respectable 208 for six.

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"If we had been bowled out for 150 there was only one team that could have won this game," McCullum told a news conference.

"England are on top but for us it's not a bad day either. It was pretty bittersweet, I'm proud but a touch disappointed."

"Last time I got very nervous through the nineties. I have spent

the last four years thinking about it. This time I felt quite comfortable, I just thought remain aggressive, I just missed a straight one."

McCullum battled hard and had a share of luck in his first 50 runs. James Anderson was the pick of the Second Division Kabaddi League by winning their respective semifinals at the outer stadium kabaddi court.

Prisons Directorate trounced Orbachin 76-11 in the first semifinal while Swarni Sangsd crushes Institute of Kabaddi 67-21 in the second.

"It was extremely tough batting conditions. You could be happy with playing an ugly innings for a period of time," McCullum added.

"Runs on the board was going to be the most significant aspect. At 100 for five it was teetering and in real danger of being rock and roll."

After reaching his ninth test half-century, McCullum began to take charge, moving down the pitch in a manner he has introduced to one-day cricket where he bats as opener.

"We have got plans for him but it's disconcerting," Anderson confided.

McCullum said his good form in one-day cricket helped in what he called "the pinnacle of the game".

He was also self-deprecating about a magnificent six over extra-cover off the distinctly quick Stuart Broad.

"I think it was the only one I hit in the middle. It was quite nice," he said.

LOCAL SNIPS

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP blanked Mukta Jiban 2-0 in the inaugural south zone match of the Pioneer Football League at the Mohammadpur Idgah ground yesterday.

Saifuddin and Nahid scored for the winners in the 31st and 46th minutes respectively.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) vice president and former national footballer Badal Roy inaugurated the south zone matches as chief guest.

NATIONAL CRICKET CHAMPIONSHIP

The final round of the 28th National Cricket Championship, which was scheduled to begin from today, has been deferred by four days and now will kick off on May 21.

Dhaka will play against Comilla at the Sylhet Stadium in the opening match.

Eight venue champions qualified for the final round and the other teams are Narayanganj, Khulna, Barisal, Nilphamari and Rangpur.

DIVII CRICKET

Eskaton Sabuj Sangha defeated Dhanmondi Cricket Academy by 20 runs in a low-scoring encounter of the Second Division Super League at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Batting first, Eskaton were bowled out for 161 runs in 43 overs with Shama and Adil taking three wickets each. In reply, DCA were skittled out in the 47th over for only 141 runs. Shafiqul took three wickets for Eskaton although Rumman put up some fight with the bat, scoring 25.

UNIVERSITY CRICKET

Hosts University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) managed a seven-run victory over BRAC University to reach the final of the ULAB Fair Play Cup Twenty20 tournament at their campus ground in Ramchandrapur.

ULAB scored 109-8 in stipulated 20 overs with Sohel scoring 25 runs and then restricted BRAC University for 102-9.

State University will face BRAC University in today's match.

DIVII KABADDI

Prisons Directorate and Swarni Sangsd advanced to the final of the Second Division Kabaddi League by winning their respective semifinals at the outer stadium kabaddi court.

Prisons Directorate trounced Orbachin 76-11 in the first semifinal while Swarni Sangsd crushed Institute of Kabaddi 67-21 in the second.

Usha keep

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reduce the arrears two minutes from time.

Meanwhile, Azad Sporting Club moved to fifth place with their third win when they came from behind to thrash second-from-bottom Bangalore Sporting Club 6-2.

Azad secured nine points to topple Mariners in the table and brightened a chance to reach the superleague.

Pushkar Khisha scored two while Mansoor, Ajit, Jamil and Belal added the rest for Azad who led 3-2 in the first half.

Sajib and Anik scored for the losers.

POINTS TABLE

Teams	M	W	D	GF	GA	Total
Abahani	6	6	0	30	5	18
Usha	6	6	0	36	12	18
MSC	6	5	1	21	5	16
Sonal Bank	6	3	1	2	17	16
Azad	6	3	0	10	17	9
Mariners	6	2	1	3	10	10
Ajax	6	1	1	4	10	7
Wari	6	1	0	5	3	16
BSC	6	0	1	5	6	27
Bima	6	0	1	5	3	28

Sidebottom

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with the new ball, Sidebottom bowled Kyle Mills for 10 with an inswinger.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 208 for 6)

Howc Ambrose b Anderson 7
Redmond c Cook b Anderson 0
Marshall c Strauss b Broad 24
Taylor c Collingwood b Broad 19
McCullum b Paneser 97
Flynn b Anderson 9

Oram c Strauss b Sidebottom 28
Vettori b Sidebottom 48
Mills b Sidebottom 10
Southon b Sidebottom 1
Martin not out 0

Extras: (b-16, lb-14, w