

Asif to fight on

PTI, Karachi
Even after his 'B' sample confirmed his dope flunk, disgraced Pakistan pacer Mohammad Asif said he would prove his innocence by pointing out to the Indian Premier League Drugs Tribunal the procedural irregularities while taking his urine sample.

Asif's urine sample, taken during an IPL semifinal match, was found positive for nandrolone and his 'B' sample tested in Switzerland confirmed the dope flunk but the traces of the banned substance were of different quantities in the two tests.

"I am confident of clearing myself from doping charges. I say this because of unusual circumstances under which my urine sample was taken. There were irregularities I noticed but I will talk about these when I face the tribunal," said Asif who is to appear before an IPL Drugs Tribunal this month.

He said he was shocked with disbelief when he first heard of his positive dope test in July.

"I just couldn't believe this had happened. That I had tested positive for any banned substance because I have never used any in my life," he said.

"I still don't understand why it took one and half months for the IPL to announce the result of my dope test. Results of a dope test is nowadays at the most available in a week. It makes me suspicious," Asif told Daily Express.

The pacer also accused some lobby in Pakistan for trying to sully his image and destroy his cricket career.

"I know there is a certain lobby which is out to create problems for me. These incidents happening to me have been blown out of proportion by this same lobby which does not want to see me play for Pakistan," he said.

"I had come through 19 days in detention in Dubai, which were the most difficult time for me. So, I am not running away from these problems, I will fight."

Beginning

FROM PAGE 17 international future -- he is already out of the ODI picture.

A national selector and a senior BCCI official whom Cricinfo spoke to said the selectors consulted Anil Kumble, the India Test captain, and Gary Kirsten, the national coach, before dropping Ganguly. Both Kumble and Kirsten were completely on board with the decision, they said.

One of the selectors also spoke to Ganguly about the decision and the former India captain has "accepted it", the selector said.

"The decision to drop Ganguly is a signal to the team," the selector said. "He's 36-37 and we felt it was getting increasingly tough for him to cope with the fielding and fitness levels expected at the international level. We spoke to Kumble and Kirsten too, and they were with us on this. We felt we should put in place the process of deciding in the next set of players."

While the decision to drop Ganguly was based on a dip in form and his diminishing fielding skills, they said, the selectors were not convinced that Yuvraj was completely fit.

However, both insisted that Ganguly's Test future could still be revived by the new national selection committee, which will pick the Test team for the four-Test series against Australia starting on October 9.

Apparently, the selectors are hoping that Mohammad Kaif, who impressed them with a well-made 94 in the India A vs Australia A match in Bangalore last week, will fill Ganguly's slot in the middle.

"There is also a good chance for Badrinath (the India A skipper), the selector said. "Badrinath came up with a convincing display in Sri Lanka last month and he is a fantastic fielder too. But again, it is up to the new selection panel."

He said that Yuvraj's fitness was the main reason why he was dropped -- the left-hander has been dogged by a knee injury, and is also believed to be nursing a shoulder injury.

Meanwhile, Ashok Dinda, the Bengal medium-pacer, got a surprise call-up to the squad while Sachin Tendulkar, who declared himself fit for the match has made it along with Rahul Dravid and VVS Laxman. Parthiv Patel, the other promotion from the India A side, is likely to open the batting with Wasim Jaffer.

Badrinath, meanwhile, will continue leading India A side, in the limited-overs tri-series, involving Australia A and New Zealand A, starting on September 15. His deputy will be Suresh Raina, fresh from impressive showings in the Asia Cup and in Sri Lanka. Dinesh Karthik, who lost out on the Irani Trophy slot to Parthiv, will be India A's keeper in the tri-series.

There were rewards for those who did well in the inaugural IPL: Swapnil Asnodkar, Abhishek Nayar, Dhawal Kulkarni, Yusuf Pathan and Wriddhiman Saha found themselves in the 15-member squad. Hyderabad opener DB Ravi Teja was included, as was Saurashtra's Jaydev Shah. Irfan Pathan and Praveen Kumar, India's ODI regulars, will also play in the series, while Piyush Chawla and Robin Uthappa, dropped recently, get another chance to impress the selectors.

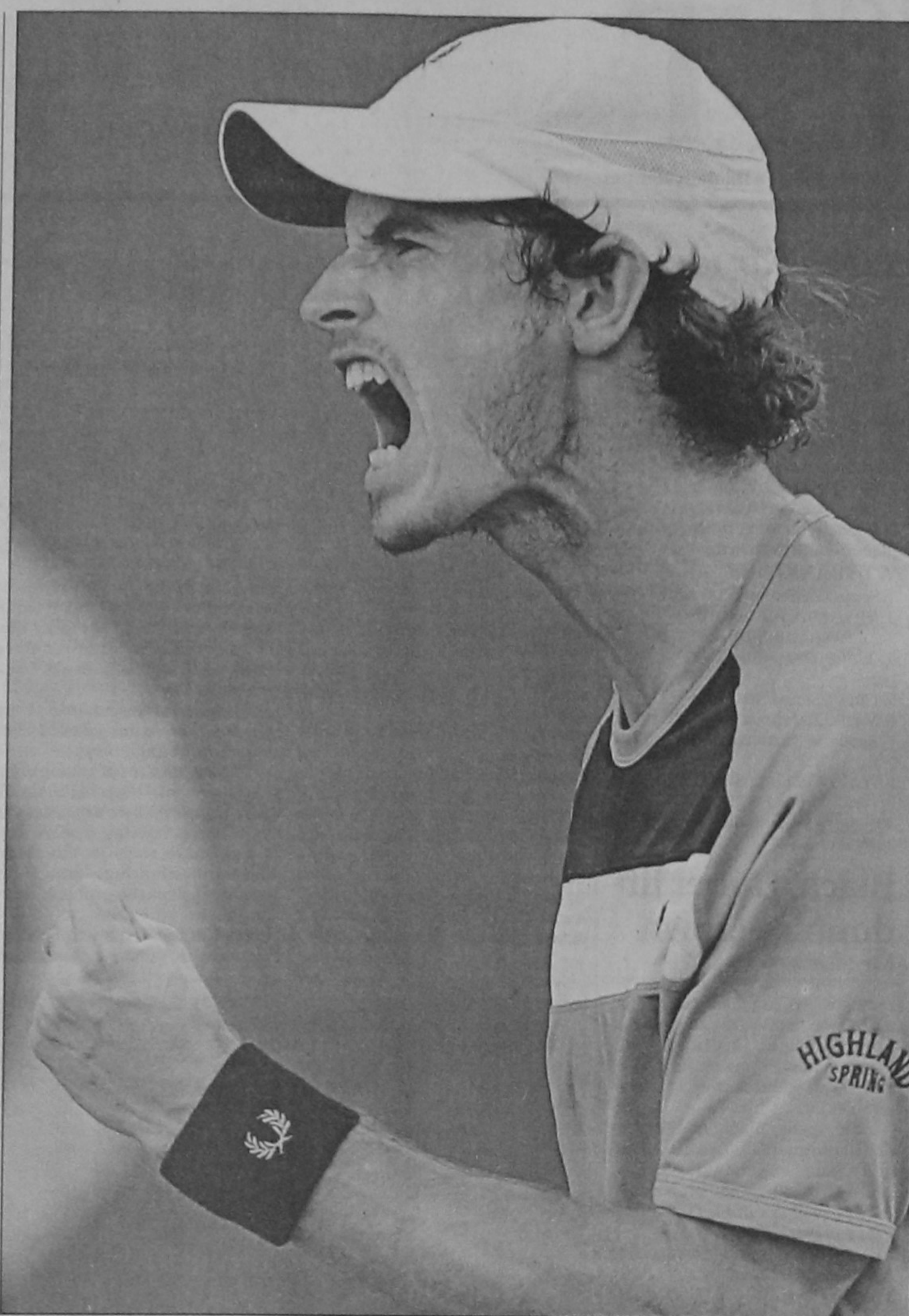


PHOTO: AFP

Great Britain's Andy Murray is ecstatic after beating Spanish world number one Rafael Nadal in the semifinals of the US Open at the Flushing Meadows on Sunday. Murray now has the chance to become the first British man in the Open era to win a Grand Slam if he can overcome Roger Federer in the final today.

Murray can be catalyst

Reaches first Grand Slam final

AFP, New York



US Open finalist Andy Murray hopes he can do for British tennis what an Ashes victory did for English cricket and a World Cup title did for England rugby - lift the sport to a higher level.

Murray gave himself a chance to become Britain's first Grand Slam men's singles champion in the 40-year Open era by defeating world number one Rafael Nadal 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4 on Sunday in the US Open semi-finals.

To be sure, his challenge is mighty. The 21-year-old Scotsman faces 12-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer, the Swiss superstar who seeks his fifth US Open crown in a row, in Monday's rain-postponed final at Flushing Meadows.

But Murray has won two of three

prior meetings with Federer and remains calm and confident that his workout regimen will pay off with magical match results.

"In the past I maybe did think about pressure because I hadn't worked maybe as hard as I should have," Murray said. "But now that's not the case."

Murray will jump to fourth in the new ATP rankings, matching Greg Rusedski and Tim Henman for the highest mark in British history, and has joined Rusedski and John Lloyd as Britain's only men's Slam finalists in the Open era.

That gives him a unique chance to follow in the footsteps of England's 2005 Ashes cricket victory over Australia, the first since 1987, and England's 2003 Rugby World Cup finals extra-time triumph over the Aussies.

"When you have a team or someone who wins the big events, it makes a big difference to the popularity of a sport in your coun-

try," Murray said. "With rugby back home, when England won the World Cup, rugby became a huge sport pretty much overnight."

"Cricket, when England won the Ashes, that went from being a smaller sport to having a lot of cricketers become celebrities after that. It was sort of a much cooler sport."

While Murray's prime drive to win a Slam title comes from within and the support of family and friends, there is a sense that he could boost tennis in Britain in a way no predecessor has done.

"If the popularity of tennis grows because of me, then that's great," Murray said. "I've always tried to do bits and pieces for British tennis when I'm back home."

"I think no matter what you do, how many little things you do, when you do something big like this, I think that's when the big difference happens."

Jankovic counts positives

AGENCIES, undated



Ever-smiling Serb Jelena Jankovic dwelt on the positives after losing the U.S. Open women's final to Serena Williams 6-4 7-5 on Sunday.

Although the 23-year-old squandered four set points in the second set before being overpowered by the American, she was delighted to have reached her first grand slam final.

"I had a great two weeks," Jankovic told reporters. "I really fought hard out there every match and tonight I gave everything I had. Unfortunately it was not enough."

"Tonight was special because it was my first final of a grand slam but I did not look at it that way. I really went out there like it's just another final of a tournament."

"We had great points and it was entertaining tennis out there. But she was the better one tonight."

"I had my chances in the first set and in the second set as well, and also some unlucky points. I should have won them but I didn't. I let my opportunities slip away."

Jankovic, who booked her place in the final with a 6-4 6-4 win over Russian Elena Dementieva, stretched out the rallies in the second set with her terrier-like retrieving but failed to take advantage while Williams became noticeably fatigued.

"I felt she was tired and I really had my chances," the Serb said. "I really was a little bit upset about the umpire, you know. She (Williams) took quite a lot of time in between the points and I thought it was not fair."

"When I played against Dementieva and I just went to take the towel, I received a time viola-

tion. I think it should be (the same) for all the players if she goes and takes more than 15 seconds, and not once but many times."

"She took her time to recover and get back. But you can talk all day about this. I lost, she won. That's what counts."

Jankovic, who beat Williams on the way to the semifinals of the Australian Open in January, was pleased to bury memories of a series of niggles earlier in the season.

"Overall I was happy that I made it to the finals, especially as I struggled a lot this year," she said. "I had a lot of injuries and all these problems and I really worked hard to be here on this stage."

"I'm proud of that and it will hopefully give me a lot of motivation to continue to work hard. Hopefully I can be healthy and work hard on my game and become an even better player."

Pistorius set to debut

FROM PAGE 17 With golds in the women's javelin and women's air pistol during the day's events on Monday, China rose to the top of the medals standings.

The hosts, the United States and Britain all had five golds. However China had 17 medals in total, with the United States second with 10 medals and Britain next with eight. China, which topped the medals table at the 2004 Athens

Paralympics with 63 golds ahead of Britain and Canada, is widely expected to dominate again -- and even more comprehensively than at last month's Olympics.

More than 4,000 competitors from nearly 150 countries and regions are battling for 472 gold medals in 20 sports at the eye-catching venues used for the Olympics such as the "Bird's Nest" and the Water Cube. The sports at the Paralympics,

which ends on September 17, include athletics, swimming, powerlifting, wheelchair fencing and five-a-side and seven-a-side football, as well as the lesser-known goalball and bocce.

China, eager to showcase the progress it has made in catering for the disabled, has adopted the motto "Two Games with Equal Splendour," for the Games, comparing them with the Olympics.

Mendis working on variations

CRICINFO, undated

Ajantha Mendis, the Sri Lankan spinner, has said he will need to find ways to beat the Indians after they managed to play him reasonably well during the recently-concluded one-day series.

India won the series 3-2 and Mendis took 13 wickets at 11.69 but he said the Indians played him cautiously.

"Talented batsmen learn quickly and correct their mistakes," Mendis told the Sunday Lankima News, a Sri Lanka-based weekly. "It should be like that. I didn't expect it to be so successful. But I should say this -- I've a long way to go."

Mendis also said English counties Sussex, Surrey and Kent had expressed interest in him but he decided to take a month off to rest. He also planned to work on his batting during the period.

He asked fans and the media not to expect too much from him for that but he put him under a lot of pressure. "I'm still new to this field. Don't worry. I know how to use my head. I don't run after money. My first place is for cricket. I'll get everything if only I play well."

Romania suffer injury woes

AFP, Bucharest

Romania's injury woes continued on Monday with strikers Daniel Niculae and Ciprian Marica both ruled out of the 2010 World Cup qualifier midweek against the Faroe Islands.

VfB Stuttgart's Marica suffered a right hip injury and Niculae, who has been recovering from an adductor injury, has been ruled out for family reasons.

Defender Gabriel Tamas is also doubtful with a right ankle problem.

Captain Cristi Chivu and striker Adrian Mutu are recovering from injuries and have not been selected while midfielder Banel Nicolita also took a knock just before their tie against Lithuania.

Ash in no mood

FROM PAGE 17

Young, who had successfully operated on Mashrafe's knees five years back.

"What we learnt is that he (Mashrafe) is okay now," informed Ashraf.

The Tigers' training camp for the upcoming home series against the Black Caps is expected to start from September 22.

New Zealand arrive here in first week of October to play three one-day internationals and two Tests in Dhaka and Chittagong.

Serena blows

FROM PAGE 17

herself on the giant video boards high above Arthur Ashe Stadium.

At one point, she saw herself on the screen and promptly fixed her hair.

"They should turn it off, because I keep looking," she said. "You see your big face up there and you can't help but look up."

Venus Williams got ample air time, too. Sitting in the guest box, she cheered on the sister she teamed up with to win the Olympics doubles title.

Serena Williams won her first Grand Slam championship since the 2007 Australian Open, and took over the No. 1 ranking Jankovic held last month for exactly one week.

"I feel so young and I feel so energized," Williams said. "Sometimes, I'd wake up at 6 in the morning to go practice and it was too dark."

Williams and Jankovic originally were scheduled to play Saturday night, but rain from Tropical Storm Hanna delayed their match.

Brothers futsal

FROM PAGE 17

Brothers received Tk 50,000 and Abahani pocketed Tk 25,000.

BFF vice presidents Badal Roy, Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir, members Khurshid Babul, Anwarul Hoque Helal were also present.

Muktijodha withdrew in the last minute from the eight-team event while Mohammedan walked out during their last group match against Brothers in protest of on-pitch violence and later forfeited their semifinal against Abahani.

ICC shortlists

FROM PAGE 17

T20 INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF THE YEAR: Chris Gayle (WIS) Mahendra Singh Dhoni (IND) Brett Lee (AUS) Yuvraj Singh (IND)

WOMEN'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR: Nicola Browne (NZL) Charlotte Edwards (ENG) Lisa Sthalekar (AUS) Claire Taylor (ENG)

SPIRIT OF CRICKET AWARD: Bangladesh New Zealand Sri Lanka West Indies

EMPIRE OF THE YEAR: Mark Benson (ENG) Aleem Dar (PAK) Steve Davis (AUS) Rudi Koertzen (RSA) Simon Taufel (AUS)

Pakistan dealt new blow

AFP, New Delhi



The second edition of the Twenty 20 Champions League will be held in September-October 2009, organisers said on Monday, dealing another blow to the crisis-ridden Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

The dates of the multi-million dollar event clash with the International Cricket Council's decision to hold the Champions Trophy one-day tournament in October 2009.

The Champions Trophy, the International Cricket Council's (ICC) second biggest tournament after the World Cup, was due to be held this month but was cancelled by the world body due to security concerns in Pakistan.

The ICC, while announcing the cancellation last month, said the event would take place in October 2009 with Pakistan remaining the first choice venue pending a security assessment.

India, Australia and South Africa

set themselves on a collision course with the ICC on Monday by saying the next edition of inter-club T20 Champions League will be held from September 25-October 11, 2009.

With Australia due to tour India for seven one-day internationals from mid-October next year, the ICC faces tough negotiations to go through with the Champions Trophy on the allotted dates.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India, Cricket Australia and Cricket South Africa today announced the dates of the second edition of the Champions League Twenty20 from September 25th to October 11th, 2009," a joint release by the three boards said.

"The 2009 edition will feature 12 teams and will see 23 matches played. It is scheduled during the prime Indian festive season."

ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat, in New Delhi to announce the nominees for the 2008 international awards, said the governing body will meet in Dubai on Thursday to discuss the calendar.

"A framework for the existing

Future Tours Program (FTP) exists and we will work within this framework," Lorgat told reporters.

"I do not agree with the implication that the FTP is going out of control due to new events."

The inaugural eight-nation T20 Champions League, boasting a six-million-dollar purse, is due to take place from December 3-10 this year at a venue yet to be determined.

The event will be contested by the top two teams of the domestic T20 competitions in India, Australia and South Africa and one team each from England and Pakistan.

The tournament had been due to take place in September but was put back to December following objections from the ICC that it was being held too close to the now postponed Champions Trophy.

The recent boom in Twenty20 cricket, sparked by the lucrative Indian Premier League this year, has led to concern in some quarters about the future of traditional Test and one-day cricket.

A \$20m question



CRICINFO, undated

It's the 20 million dollar question. Who are England going to take to Antigua for the Stanford Super Series and thereby hand a chance of the biggest payday of their careers? On Tuesday those lucky few will be announced, along with the one-day squad to tour India and the next batch of central contracts. Players will be hanging by the phone more than usual.

Given the cohesive unit Kevin Pietersen has formed in the first few weeks of his captaincy, the Stanford game throws up a few potential difficulties. There are going to be some very disappointed players who miss out on the trip and it will be one of Pietersen's challenges to make sure any feelings of resentment don't linger. It's possible that a couple of players who don't go to Antigua will still be named for India. Four weeks travelling between the likes of Guwahati and Jamshepur doesn't sound quite as appealing as a week by the beach.

However, if the selectors want to give England the best chance of claiming the bounty they will have to banish all thoughts of keeping

people happy. England haven't yet found a Twenty20 formula that works consistently, from a financial point of view November 1 would be a good time to start.

As with most squads, the majority of places are decided fairly easily. The core of the side remains the same from 50-over to 20-over cricket. It's those few variables that will provide the tricky decisions. An extra batsman? How many spinners? Quick bowlers versus all-rounders?

He has come to the party very late, but Steve Harmison is being favoured by everyone that matters. It will be a gamble to play him, but such is Twenty20 that any bowler can suddenly be taken for 10 an over. Wickets are important, too, and four good overs from Harmison can win a game. If England take just 13 players it will be difficult to squeeze in four quicks, so Ryan Sidebottom could be left to rue his brittle second half to the season. For 18 months he has carried England's attack, but sentiment isn't going to win anyone any money.

The key also lies in having players who can slot in and play a number of roles, so Ravi Bopara should travel as he can be a spare batsman, fill-in bowler and is lively in the field. No place, however, for Alastair Cook whose

game is not suited to Twenty20. The matches will all be played on Allen Stanford's postage-stamp ground near the airport, but that doesn't mean spin should be discounted. The slow bowlers have been match-winners in all conditions in Twenty20, so Graeme Swann should catch the plane, alongside Samit Patel, and keep his dream of a pink Ferrari alive. Again, he is also a multi-dimensional cricketer.

With the uniqueness of the prize on offer there will be a clamour for the selectors to be bold. Graham Napier is the name that comes out on top after his unbeaten 152 against Sussex in June. He followed it with a couple of other eye-catching displays, but there has certainly been a case of bandwagon-jumping with all the talk of him being an England player. Twenty20 specialists were tried in South Africa last year -- remember Chris Schofield, Darren Maddy, Jeremy Snape and James Kirtley? -- with little success.

PROBABLE SQUAD Kevin Pietersen (captain), Ian Bell, Matt Prior (wicketkeeper), Owais Shah, Andrew Flintoff, Paul Collingwood, Ravi Bopara, Samit Patel, Graeme Swann, Luke Wright, Stuart Broad, James Anderson, Steve Harmison.

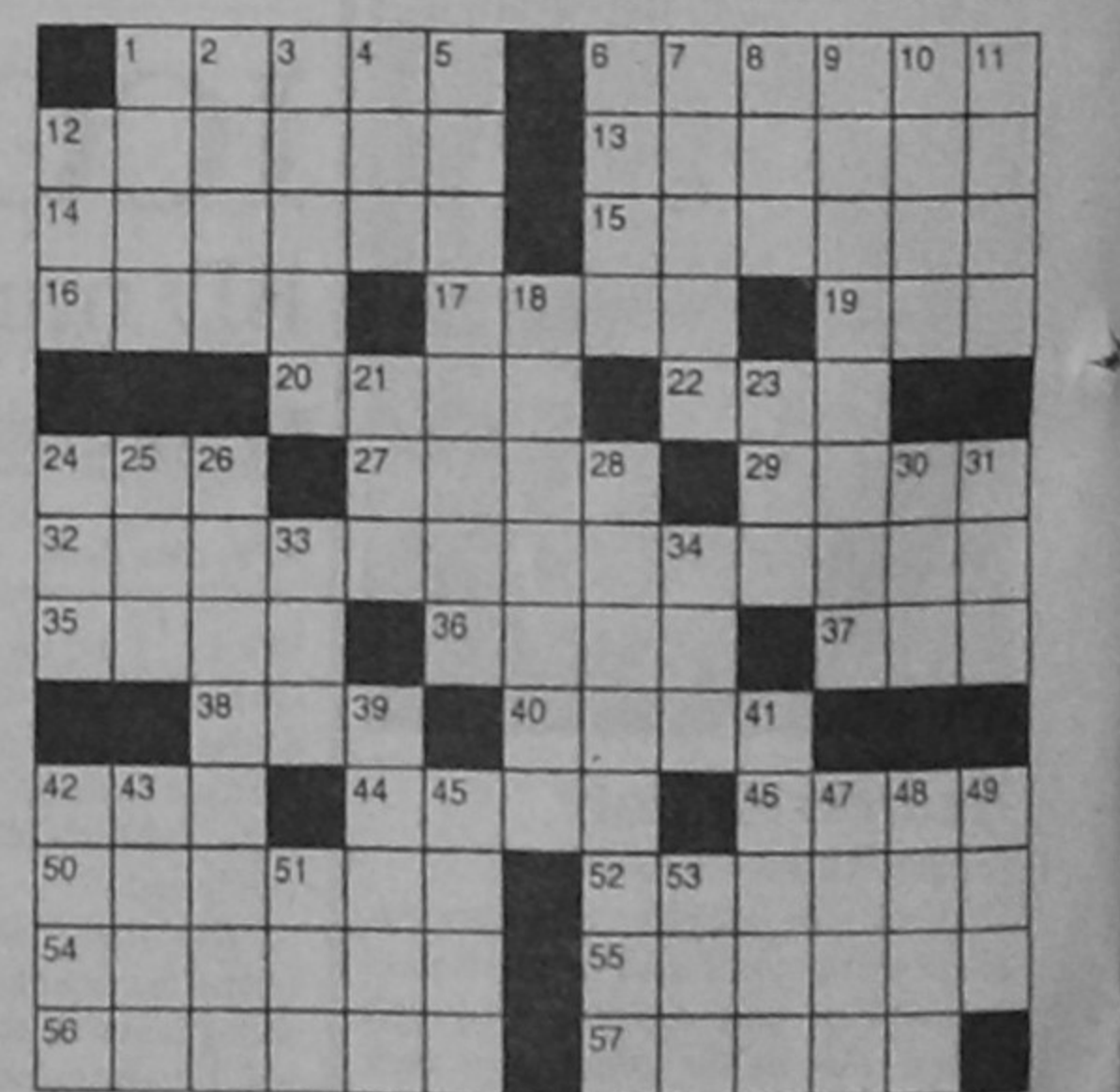


PHOTO: STAR

The victorious Brothers Union footballers celebrate on the podium with the first-ever Citycell Futsal trophy that they won with a 4-3 win over Abahani in the final at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Dutch abbr. 42 Calendar 5 Decline gradually 24 "Monty Python" opener 6 Exam- at times 44 Bakery worker, 6 - And Span 25 Wardrobe malfunction 7 18 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 12 Type of mysticism (Var.) 52 Ducked 52-Across figures 13 Jipijapa hat 55 Tenant 10 Ostriches' kin 30 - Little Teapot? 14 Brace 57 Parspiration 11 Morse T 31 Started 15 He flew too near the sun 12 Book-keeper (Abbr.) 33 Ram's fan? 34 Old studio letters 42 Ran like the wind 43 Peregrinate 45 Relinquish 47 Houston acronym 48 Regiment 49 Tribute in verse 51 Big bother 53 A handful



CRYPTOQUIP

TSBKSNGE X UVYYNGE IANYU. N AYXBQ X TRVNFYJXG BSG NGIR X FASBFA XGQ MYVV "KIRT AMJG" Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A HOT DOG CONNOISSEUR ADORES A CERTAIN TOPPING, COULD YOU SAY HE REALLY RELISHES HIS FOOD? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals A