

Pistorius's thrilling win

AFP, Beijing
The Paralympics was rocked by its first drugs scandal on Tuesday but "Blade Runner" Oscar Pistorius quickly created headlines for the right reasons with a thrilling 100m victory on the track.

As China and Britain battled it out at the top of the medals table, the South African star edged the USA's Jerome Singleton by just 0.03secs after a sluggish start.

He crossed the line in 11.17secs in front of a near full house at the "Bird's Nest" National Stadium on a wet night.

Brian Frasure of the United States took the bronze but the much-anticipated showdown with Marlon Shirley failed to materialise as the American collapsed two-thirds into the race.

"It's unbelievable. The 100 metres was something I was definitely a bit worried about," said Pistorius, adding that he had had to fight hard after his slow start on the wet track.

"I was just so happy. After the first 30 metres I thought 'well the first 30 is done, it's behind me, I've messed it up and now I can focus on the rest of the race,'" added Pistorius, who will now look to the 200m and 400m.

The 21-year-old is the world record holder in his category in all three sprint events he is competing in at the Paralympics.

Nicknamed after the carbon fibre blades he wears, Pistorius staged a high-profile quest to qualify for the Olympics in the 400m event, but eventually fell short.

Nevertheless, he is aiming to compete against the able-bodied elite in the London 2012 Games.

Earlier Tuesday a shadow was cast over the Games when it was revealed that Pakistani powerlifter Naveed Ahmed Butt, 37, had been given a two-year ban for steroid use.

In the first drugs scandal of the Paralympics, he tested positive for the steroid methandienone metabolites on September 4, two days before the opening ceremony, the International Paralympic Committee said.

"In accordance with the IPC anti-doping code, and after a hearing of the IPC anti-doping committee, the IPC ratified the decision to disqualify Butt," the committee said in a statement.

England's 15

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standing performance in beating such a talented one-day side as South Africa so comprehensively," said Miller. "It bodes extremely well for the tough challenges that lie ahead this winter and is reflected in our decision to retain the bulk of the squad from this summer's NatWest Series for both the Stanford Super Series and the tour of India."

Players awarded an Increment Contract will receive an additional one-off payment from ECB on top of the salary they receive from their county. These contracts have been awarded, for the most part, to England's one-day specialists, although the announcement of such contracts for both wicketkeepers, Matt Prior and Tim Ambrose, undermines the suspicion that Prior had begun to nudge ahead in his race to cement his place in the team for both Test and one-day cricket.

SQUAD

Kevin Pietersen (captain), James Anderson, Ian Bell, Ravi Bopara, Stuart Broad, Paul Collingwood, Alastair Cook, Andrew Flintoff, Stephen Harrison, Samit Patel, Matt Prior (wicketkeeper), Owais Shah, Graeme Swann, Ryan Sidebottom, Luke Wright.

Up-and-coming

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"Even when I was playing Nadal and I was up a couple of sets and it went overnight. I didn't get too excited about things and just stayed relaxed and that helped."

Not only did Murray earned 750,000 dollars as the runner-up but he collected a second check for 250,000 dollars for finishing second in the US Open Series.

Asked what he planned to do with his first million dollar payday, Murray joked, "That's about 10 pounds isn't it." He then turned serious.

"I would never have even thought. A million dollars is so much money for someone my age. That's the biggest check that I've ever had by a long shot."

"Hopefully I will have a few more of them."

Heading into Monday's final, Murray had beaten Federer in two of their three previous meetings, including the final of the 2005 ATP Bangkok tournament.

"Each month I have been making improvements," Murray said. "My results have got better. A lot of things have gotten much better but these are the tournaments that I think all tennis players really want to win."

"I didn't do it tonight and I am going to have to work very hard to do it some day."

Big 'egos' hurting Pakistan: Akhtar

INTERNET, undated

Pakistan pacer Shoaib Akhtar lashed out at some members of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), saying some people in the Board with 'big egos' are hurting the interests of the game in the country.

"Some people (in the Pakistan cricket administration) want to force their will and also want to save their egos. In the process they have hurt not only me but also the country and the Pakistan cricket," said Shoaib as reported by ANI.

"However, at the end of the day I am back and I will play for Pakistan and God willing Pakistan will be back on the winning track," he added.

Last month, the PCB had left the Shoaib out of a training camp after he did not pay a fine imposed on him.

The pacer, who was in the Champions Trophy squad, had been asked to pay a fine of seven million Pakistani rupees by July 14 in order to be considered for selection after his five-year ban was reduced to 18 months.

Meanwhile, AFP reports that a hearing on fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar's appeal against an 18-month ban was postponed Tuesday because the judge was not available.

The 33-year-old pacer is appealing the ban and a fine of seven million rupees (100,000 dollars).

"Lahore High Court Justice Syed Zahid Hussain was not available to hear the case as he was attending the swearing-in ceremony of the president of Pakistan in Islamabad," PCB lawyer Tafazzul Rizvi told AFP.

A new date for the hearing would be announced next week, he said.

The original ban of five years was imposed by the PCB disciplinary committee in April following Akhtar's public criticism of the board in January when he was axed from the list of 15 contracted players.

An appeal committee reduced

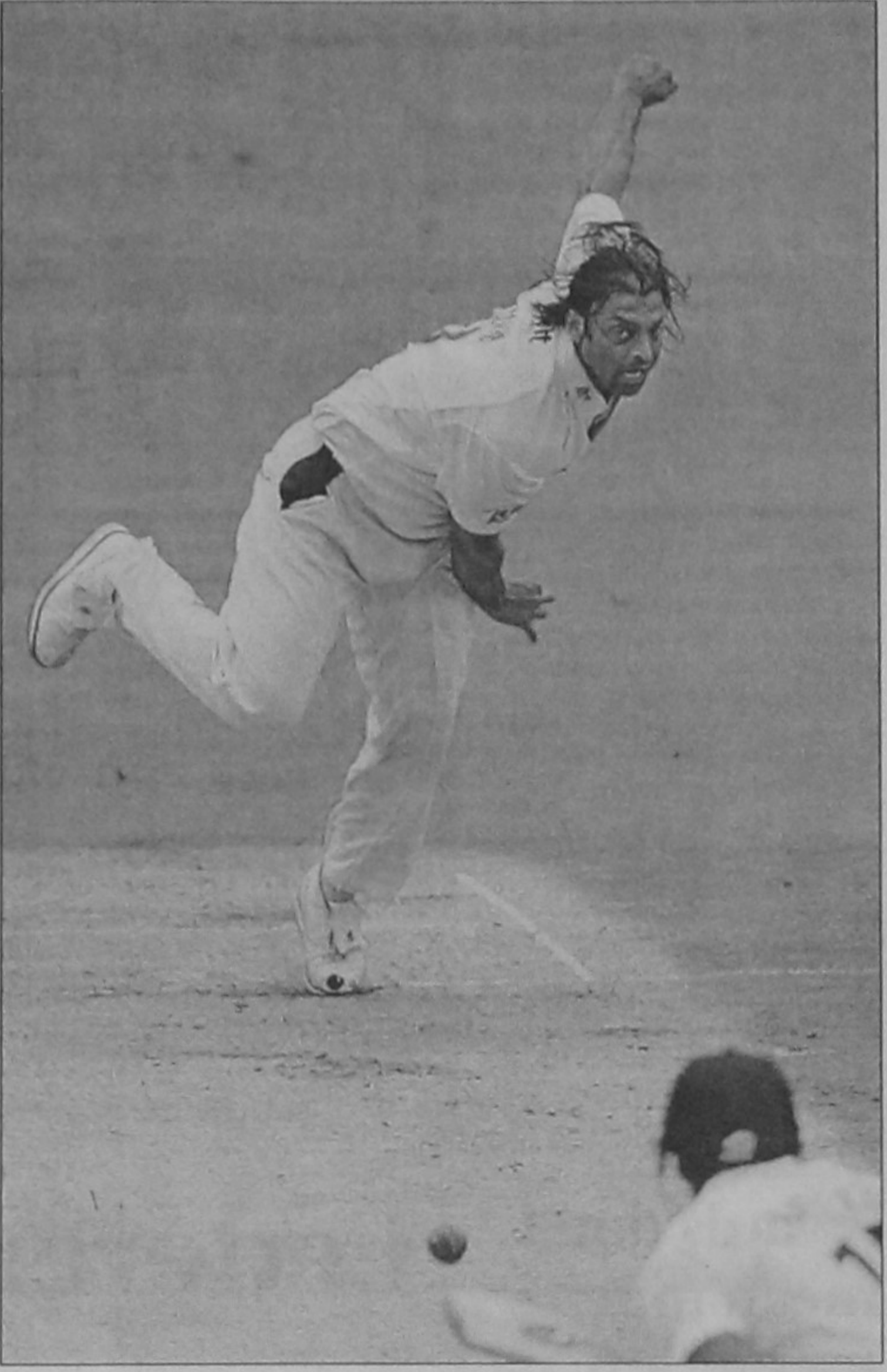
the ban but imposed the fine in June before the Lahore High Court suspended the ban the same month, allowing Akhtar to play in the Indian Premier League.

However the court upheld the fine, a prerequisite for Akhtar representing Pakistan again.

He was named to a 15-man

squad for the Champions Trophy that was to be held in September but was postponed for 12 months amid security fears in Pakistan.

The injury-prone pacerman in London due to play for Surrey in a county game against Hampshire starting at The Oval on Tuesday.



Paceman Shoaib Akhtar delivers a thunderbolt in Surrey's county match against Hampshire at The Brit Oval on Tuesday.

'Lawson on leave'

INTERNET, undated

The Pakistan Cricket Board have played down national coach Geoff Lawson's decision to leave abruptly for Australia on Monday and take leave with his family.

"He will be back later this month," PCB spokesman Mansoor Suhail told the Associated Press.

Lawson, a former Australian Test bowler, left Pakistan as the cricket board is working to fill the gap left by the postponement of the Champions Trophy limited-overs tournament and arrange some international cricket for its team -- most likely against Sri Lanka.

"His annual leaves were due and there's nothing more than that," Sohail said.

"If the series against Sri Lanka materialises, Lawson will surely come back much earlier and join the team," he added.

Local media have reported

Lawson's position may be in doubt in the new-look PCB after chairman Nasim Ashraf resigned on 18 August, just hours after the organisation's patron President Pervez Musharraf stepped down as Pakistan leader.

The PCB's new patron -- President Asif Ali Zardari -- is expected to name a new chairman later this month.

"I have no insecurities," Lawson was quoted as saying in The News newspaper on Sunday.

Lawson, who took over the Pakistan coaching duties in July 2007 steered the national team to the final of inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa last year.

Under Lawson's coaching, Pakistan lost both Test series at home against South Africa and one against India in India last year. This year, Australia were expected to tour Pakistan, but the tour was postponed due to security concerns.

Pakistan -- who have not played a single Test match in 2008 -- are not expected to play its next Test match before January 2009 when India

visits. They currently stands at number six position in both the International Cricket Council's Test and ODI rankings.

Lawson took up the Pakistan coaching job after the death of Bob Woolmer at last year's World Cup, describing the role as a "big challenge."

"I will continue to focus on my task which is to make Pakistan the world's best team," he said at the time.

"I had several lucrative options in Australia but accepted to be Pakistan's coach because it was a big challenge for me. And I will continue to focus on my task which is to make Pakistan the world's best team."

Lawson, who took 180 wickets in 46 Test matches for Australia between 1980-1989, recently failed to convince Australian and New Zealand players to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy as part of the International Cricket Council's security taskforce.

The event had to be postponed for a year due to growing security fears held by Australia, New Zealand, England and South Africa.

Door open for Watson

INTERNET, undated

The expected withdrawal of Andrew Symonds for next month's tour of India has the all-rounder Shane Watson thinking about what would be his greatest challenge. Symonds, who was sent home from the one-day series against Bangladesh for going fishing, is waiting to start formal counselling sessions as part of his Cricket Australia rehabilitation and it is highly unlikely he will be picked in the Test squad towards the end of this week.

Watson has won support from James Sutherland, Cricket Australia's chief executive, who admitted Symonds could be lost to the game. "I don't think that's impossible," Sutherland said on ABC radio when asked if Symonds might never play for Australia again.

"I think the message the Australian players have sent is that we want Andrew Symonds in our team, but we want Andrew Symonds absolutely committed and wanting to be there. They're really asking him that question. If he can't answer that question, it may well be that he's lost to the team."

Sutherland said being without Symonds would be a "great loss", but there were other young talents who could fill his place. "People like Shane Watson may well get the opportunity they've yearned for so long in his absence," he said.

Watson is the most convenient contender for the No. 6 spot and his all-round skills would give Australia options, including playing another

spinner. However, Simon Katich and David Hussey, the batsmen who are part-time bowlers, may also come into contention, especially if fitness concerns remain over Matthew Hayden (heel) and Ricky Ponting (wrist).

"There is absolutely no doubt that, if I get the call-up, this would be

the biggest challenge I could face as a cricketer," Watson told the Sydney Morning Herald. "We've only won once there in 30-odd years as it is, and there are obviously other considerations as well this time around. I would love to go, but I am not going to spend too much time worrying about selection, like I used to. If it happens, it happens."

Watson said the team was "wishing the best" for Symonds, "but if there is an opportunity there, hopefully I can take it with both hands". "The leadership group have made a difficult decision (to send Symonds home from Darwin), but the message they were trying to convey was that they needed everyone at 100 per cent to set a good example to the youngsters."

Federer's

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Federer won the first game by taking four straight points.

Murray's best chance to stay in the match came in the second set with score tied at 2. Down 15-40, Federer hit a shot that looked long, but Murray kept it in play and wound up losing the point.

Murray walked to the spot to see if there was a mark, having lost his chance to call for an instant-replay challenge. Too bad, too, because a television replay showed the ball was out.

Instead of being up 3-2 and serving, Murray watched Federer rally back to win the game.

"That was key," Federer said. "After that, I began to play freely, the way I usually do."

By the third set, it was no contest as Federer went up 5-0. Murray won two games and a couple more ovations from the crowd, then it was soon over.

"I don't understand redemption quite that well, but I don't think that's what it is. I don't feel like I needed this win particularly to prove myself," Federer said.

"It's just being happy to be on top," he said. "So things are not looking that bad like everybody's talking about."

Abahani play

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run residential camp during the break, giving new coach Shaiful Islam Manik a chance to get a close look at his boys.

Manik is interested to have the camp at BKSP but it has yet to be decided.

Awards don't

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Cup between Ranji champions Delhi and Rest of India would be important for the selection in the team for the series against Australia.

But Gambhir said he was not under pressure to perform. "After playing the international cricket one is habituated to kinds of situations," he said.

City after Podolski

AFP, Munich

Manchester City have re-affirmed their interest in Germany striker Lukas Podolski whose club Bayern Munich are keen to sign Russian midfielder ace Andrei Arshavin, according to reports here.

German sports agency SID say unsettled Bayern star Podolski, who scored two goals for Germany in last Saturday's World Cup 2010 qualifier, is once again being courted by City who expressed an interest in him during the summer.

With a new Arabian owner at the helm, Manchester City are keen to boost their squad and Podolski, 23, is frustrated at being kept on the bench at Bayern - despite scoring 30 goals in 56 appearances for Germany.

And Munich newspaper TZ say Bayern are interested in signing attacking midfielder Arshavin, one of the stars of Euro 2008, who is keen to leave UEFA Cup champions Zenit St Petersburg and could replace Podolski.

"My club are doing everything they can to obstruct me leaving," a disgruntled Arshavin is quoted as telling Russian newspaper Sport Express Daily.

In World Cup 2010 Group 4 qualifiers on Wednesday night, Podolski is set to play for Germany against Finland at Helsinki's Olympic Stadium, while Arshavin's Russia take on Wales in Moscow.

PCB's tri-series hopes gone

INTERNET, undated

Pakistan's hopes of a series against Sri Lanka have been dashed due to a lack of interest from sponsors and television broadcasters.

Pakistan have been desperate to secure a series to compensate for the Champions Trophy which was postponed due to security concerns.

Plans for a Tri-series in South Africa also involving Sri Lanka fell through after Cricket South Africa failed to secure sponsors and broadcasters.

"There has been a lack of interest for the series," Pakistan Cricket Board chief operating officer Shafiqat Naghmi told the News.

"Some broadcasters who did come forward have quoted ridiculously low figures for the series. It would be impossible to hold a series on those terms."

"An amount of 2.5 million dollars would help us break even. But some broadcasters were offering 300,000 dollars and that would not be enough to pay match fees to the players."

With no international cricket available, Pakistan are now likely to conduct their own domestic Twenty20 tournament.

Naghmi, however, confirmed the quadrangular Twenty20 tournament involving hosts Canada and Sri Lanka in Toronto will be played as scheduled from October 10-13.

ICC has a lot on its plate

PTI, Dubai

The fate of the Champions Trophy, the Future Tours Programme post-2012 as well as the umpires reform system would top the agenda at a two-day meeting of ICC Chief Executives' Committee and Board members starting here from Wednesday.

With the current FTP due to conclude in May 2012, the concept of an alternative structure to bilateral tours, including an enhanced Test championship, was discussed by both the CEC and the ICC Board during meetings in Dubai in June-July.

The key considerations would be that all three formats of international cricket should be protected and promoted with Test cricket identified as the pinnacle of the sport; the "icon" Test series must be protected; ICC should look at ways of taking greater central "ownership" of international cricket outside its events or at least providing for more consistency in marketing/promotion.

The CEC and the ICC Board would also explore further the concept of a Test Championship and/or play-off.

The ICC Board will consider views of the CEC and seek to chart a course towards the successful staging of Champions Trophy in 2009 after the event, supposed to be held in Pakistan from September 12 to 28, was postponed due to security concerns raised by several participating teams.

Lifson leaving

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cricket team, Pakistan National Cricket Academy and the Sports Science Institute of South Africa, signed a two-year contract with the PCB in December last year to replace Paul Close.

Lifson is now on a ten-day vacation in South Africa and is expected to join the team before the start of the camp for the home series against New Zealand on September 22.

Britain hails its hero

AFP, London

British newspapers and former players insisted Tuesday that Andy Murray was destined for Grand Slam success despite losing in straight sets to Roger Federer in the US Open final.

The tenacious Scot, 21, was the first British player to reach a Grand Slam final since Greg Rusedski at the 1997 US Open and was bidding to become the first British man to win a Grand Slam tournament since Fred Perry in 1936.

But even though he was beaten 6-2, 7-5, 6-2 in Monday's final to the Swiss all-time great, commentators were adamant that Murray's run to the final was the start of better things to come.

"Andy has had many big breakthroughs and I think it is phenomenal how quickly his game is improving -- he's up to four in the world now, so it's on to bigger and better things," said Tim Henman, Murray's predecessor as British number one.

"There are so many areas he can improve on. His backhand is as good as there is in the game and he can be a bit more aggressive on his forehand," he told the BBC.

"I wouldn't have thought he'd waste any time worrying what

other people think. Fortunately Andy is more focused on his own game and where he needs to improve."

"I really think he can go on to be number one and not just win a grand slam but win multiple grand slams -- it is going to be fun to watch."

"There are a lot of positives to take out of the defeat even though he would have been desperate to win his first grand slam."

"But the experience he has had over the fortnight -- beating (Rafael) Nadal and getting to his first final -- and now having lost it will motivate him to work even harder and next time he plays a slam in Australia he will believe he can go all the way and win it."

Rusedski backed Murray to become the world's best -- if he can overcome the injuries which have dogged his career so far.

"Andy will do more than me and Tim did," he told Sky Sports television.

"Murray is the new number four in the world but he is only going to get better and better. I'm sure he will get to world number one. The future for him is Grand Slam finals."

"The only question -- will he stay healthy enough? That's one of the most important things we need to consider."

The Independent newspaper said British tennis was no longer just about Wimbledon and hailed

Murray's efforts. "Regardless of last night's result at Flushing Meadows, can anyone doubt that it was already a phenomenal achievement for Andy Murray to have reached the final of the US Tennis Open?" the daily said in its editorial.

Public enthusiasm for Henman was genuine and abiding, but Murray "is simply a better player. Indeed, he is now unequivocally one of the best in the world."

"Now that they have a genuine championship contender on their hands, one suspects that Britons will start to love Murray a little more."

The daily lamented that "the most significant match in the history of British tennis" since Perry's 1936 triumphs at Wimbledon and in New York was only available to view on a subscription channel.

Murray beat world number one Nadal, this year's French Open and Wimbledon champion, in the semi-finals and the Spaniard admitted the Scot deserved to beat him.

"No excuses, no complaints," the Mallorcan wrote in his blog for The Times newspaper.

"He simply played better. I had said on my previous blog that I knew this was a very, very difficult match. That Andy was playing great and that I knew this could happen. Well, it did."

Serena's double delight

AFP, New York

American tennis star Serena Williams completed her climb back to the top of the tennis world at the US Open, ending a five-year hiatus between stints as the world's No. 1 player.

It was a double-dip victory for Williams who beat Jelena Jankovic 6-4, 7-5 in the US Open women's singles championship on Sunday to win the title and the battle for the world number one ranking.

Williams spent 57 weeks at number one between July 2002 and August 2003.

Winning her third US Open title has Williams yearning for more Grand Slams and more weeks at No. 1.

"It doesn't stop here," Williams said. "I feel like I have a new career, like I feel so young and I feel so energized to play every week and to play every tournament."

"I feel like there's just so much that I can do in my career and I've never felt like I've played my best

number ones Justin Henin and Kim Clijsters.

Clijsters or Henin had reached the final of the US Open in the past three years while Williams was making her first trip back to the final in six years.

Part of the reason for that is that Williams had been distracted by other interests, leading her taking time off from tennis. She played just 44 matches in 2005 and 2006.

She also took time off in 2003 to mourn the death of her sister, Yetunde, who was shot and killed in the crime-plagued south Los Angeles neighbourhood of Watts. Williams sisters lived in until their father moved them to a young age to Florida to learn tennis.

Williams says her revival on the court this year is the result of hard work and believing in herself.

"I like that I am at nine (Grand Slams) pushing 10 because I feel like I can do it," she said.

"I obviously play well all the time in Australia. I have to win another French Open and I love Wimbledon. I definitely have the game to do it. I love winning Grand Slams, so I look forward to it."

Contrasting fortunes

INTERNET, undated

Swapanil Asnodkar, the Goa batsman, has said he was expecting a call-up to the India A side after his success at the Indian Premier League.

Asnodkar, who aggregated 311 runs from nine matches for the Rajasthan Royals, was named in the A squad for the tri-series involving Australia A and New Zealand A next month. "After the exploits in the IPL, a call from the national selectors was always around the corner," he told the Times of India.

"I knew my time would come."

Asnodkar, 24, said he wanted to be recognised for more than just his Twenty20 abilities. He averages 42.20 from 33 first-class games, with six hundreds and 11 half-centuries. "I am not getting carried away by the call. I know I have lots

to do before making the international grade."

Dilip Vengsarkar, the chairman of selectors, hoped Asnodkar would make the best of the opportunity. "Opportunities like these come rarely as the competition is extremely stiff. Swapanil is a talented cricketer and has deservedly got the nod from the selectors."

The tri-series, scheduled between September 15 and 26, will be played in Hyderabad and Chennai.

Meanwhile, Bengal fast bowler Ashok Dinda said he was surprised after being included in the 14-member Rest of India squad for the Irani Trophy.

"I was quite surprised initially, but moments later I realised that I was approaching my childhood dream," he told Kolkata-based daily the Telegraph. "It feels nice when things are getting brighter with each passing day. I am happy and want to work harder to make

this chance count."

Dinda, 24, said he was disappointed after failing to make it to the India A squad for the tri-series against Australia A and New Zealand A beginning September 16.

"I know my performances weren't that good recently. I was bit upset after being dropped from the India A ODI side. I am thankful and really excited that I have my chance now."

Dinda made his first-class debut for Bengal in the 2005-06 season and has 45 first-class wickets from 16 matches at an average of 39.15. But, he came to the fore with his impressive performance for the Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL where he picked up 9 wickets from 13 matches at 28.88.

The fast bowler attributed much of his success to his Kolkata Knight Riders teammates in the IPL. "Obviously their advice has changed my thinking altogether. After the IPL, I would like to point out that