

Simmo handed captaincy duty

CRICINFO, undated

Andrew Symonds has been handed extra responsibility as he aims to work his way back to international cricket, having been named captain of Queensland for a Twenty20 match against the Kolkata Knight Riders. Symonds will be handed the reins for a game in Brisbane on Tuesday even though the Bulls' full-time leader Chris Simpson will also play.

Trevor Barsby, the Queensland coach, said the practice games provided the team -- and Symonds -- the opportunity to experiment. "These matches against the Knight Riders are a good chance for us to have Andrew Symonds test the water as captain and lead by example on the field," Barsby said.

Symonds made his return to state cricket on the weekend, when he turned out for the Bulls in two Twenty20 fixtures against the Knight Riders. He struggled to have an impact with the bat and scored 2 and 1 in the back-to-back games.

However, Symonds's bowling was useful and he finished with figures of 0 for 8 from four overs in one match and 2 for 24 from three overs in the other. The series of practice matches has allowed Symonds to ease back into cricket following his axing from the Australia squad in Darwin.

Uncertainty over Armstrong return

BBC ONLINE, undated

Lance Armstrong's cycling comeback is in doubt because of a technicality over anti-doping re-entry rules.

Riders coming out of retirement need to be in the International Cycling Union's (UCI) anti-doping programme for six months before being allowed to race.

That would make the American ineligible for January's Tour Down Under, after he announced in September that he would make a comeback after three years out.

"Rules must be respected," said UCI president Pat McQuaid.

The sport's governing body said it would make a final decision later this week, but it is unclear when the six-month countdown will begin as the 37-year-old had to return to the United States Anti-Doping Agency's testing programme to compete in August's Leadville Trail 100 mountain bike race in Colorado.

"We have to look into that. I am not sure what the exact dates are that he started the programme," added McQuaid.

The director of the Australia race, which begins on 20 January, said they face an anxious wait to see if the seven-time Tour de France champion will be allowed to compete.

"We are sitting tight and just waiting for the process to take its course," said Mike Turtur.

"The process is with the UCI -- how they deal with it, that is internal stuff, that is up to them, so I don't know what the process is."

"It's a unique situation so they will have to deal with it and let us know what the outcome is."

If allowed to race, Armstrong will compete for Kazakhstan's Astana team.

It's India

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has some targets, and I am more focused on those."

The good news for India is that he is back to full fitness -- he had injured his elbow in the last Test in Sri Lanka and missed the Irani Cup -- and is feeling good about it. "Obviously coming back to the team you feel an energy like no other," Tendulkar said. "I have been working with our trainer, and it has worked out very well. Last two-three weeks have been quite good and I have been pleased with the way things have gone."

Tendulkar was speaking after India's first training session at the pre-series camp in Bangalore. "The first session we had been very good. It was mainly a fitness-targeted session. We enjoyed it quite a bit."

The session went for over two hours, and focused on fielding and fitness. The team will go through more specific sessions -- nets, open-wicket practice, and match simulations -- in the coming days. The first day of the camp was attended by most of the Test squad that played in Sri Lanka. The players missing from those 16 were Ganguly, the wicketkeepers Dinesh Karthik and Parthiv Patel -- since Mahendra Singh Dhoni is back -- Rohit Sharma and Pragyan Ojha, who will play for Board President's XI against the Australians. The additions at the camp were Mohammad Kaif, who took Ganguly's place in the Rest of India team for the Irani Cup, and Dhoni.

The squad for the Tests is yet to be announced, and the players present at the camp are believed to have been called by the captain and the coach. India's new selection committee will meet on October 1 to pick the team for the first two Tests, which means the tour game in Hyderabad will have no bearing on the team for the first Test in Bangalore.

Gilly replaces Laxman

CRICINFO, undated

Adam Gilchrist, the former Australian wicketkeeper-batsman, has been appointed captain of the Deccan Chargers, replacing VVS Laxman, who led the team during the inaugural season of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Darren Lehmann, the former Australia batsman, takes charge as coach, replacing former India player Robin Singh.

Gilchrist said it was a "tremendous thrill and honour" and looked forward to working hard and making the team successful. Gilchrist was Deccan's leading run-getter in the league's first edition, scoring 436 runs at 33.53. He led the team in eight of their 14 matches, after Laxman suffered a wrist injury.

"Adam Gilchrist commands respect within the team and right around the cricket world. He has redefined the role of wicketkeeper-batsman in modern cricket," Tim Wright, the Deccan Chargers chief

executive, said. "I am confident Gilchrist will unite Deccan Chargers' outstanding talent. Four members of our squad were on the India tour of Sri Lanka, more than any other IPL team, and the quality of our overseas



ADAM GILCHRIST

players is well known. These players will play for Gilchrist.

"We are delighted to be giving Darren Lehmann his first post as coach and have no doubt he will be

a great success," Wright said. "He has already brought considerable energy into the group and has a no-nonsense approach to winning cricket matches. Lehmann is in India this week to run player trials in Hyderabad. We are looking to build a solid talent base for the future."

Deccan finished last in the inaugural edition of the league, winning only two of their 14 matches. The team's poor performance was surprising given a star-studded batting line-up, with Andrew Symonds, Shahid Afridi and Herschelle Gibbs joining Gilchrist, Scott Styris, Laxman and Rohit Sharma. While Symonds was only available for four games, Afridi and Gibbs both averaged below 20.

Afridi later said Laxman was unable to keep up with the fast-paced nature of the game. "At times Laxman lost the plot on the field," Afridi told Geo News. "Twenty20 cricket is not his forte. Adam is more comfortable in this type of cricket."

Gavaskar's fear

CRICINFO, undated

Sunil Gavaskar believes India and Australia are risking overkill by scheduling too many series with not enough time in between. Australia won the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in January and nine months on, the prize will be up for grabs again in a four-Test series in India.

In the build-up to the series players from both sides have said the challenging contest matches or even outdoes the traditional rivalries of India versus Pakistan and Australia versus England. However, Gavaskar felt there should have been a longer gap between the tours.

"The fact that it was such an enthralling series last time around, it made little sense for the two teams to be confronting each other so soon and in the same year," Gavaskar wrote in his column for the Times of

India. "Too much of a good thing will even have the public fed up. If one team had been thrashed then the public would not have been too interested in the series, even if it was at a different venue."

• Pakistan's visit for Test and ODI series in India last year didn't evoke as much enthusiasm among fans compared to previous series, largely attributed to an overdose of matches between the neighbours. Gavaskar said the scheduling of the Ashes was perhaps the ideal that could be followed, as it gave sufficient time for teams to regroup.

"The other example in favour of having a reasonable gap between series is the Ashes clash in 2006-07, when Australia smarting from the unexpected loss of the Ashes in 2005, came back with a vengeance and swamped England 5-0 in the series. Now with Kevin Pietersen leading a seemingly rejuvenated England side, the Ashes series next year in England could be well worth watching."

"We have seen in the past how England have beaten West Indies in the Caribbean (in 2003-04), and within a couple of months the calypso crusaders (West Indies) were in England and got beaten again, simply because the interim period of a couple of months did not allow them to add anything new to their squad."

Australia visited India this time last year for a seven-ODI series, and another one-day campaign is due next year. Prior to India's tour of Australia earlier this year, the previous two Test series between the nations were also played within the span of a year, with eight Tests from December 2003 to November 2004.

The two boards are even keen to schedule regular games between their second-string players. Australia A visited India this month, playing two three-day games against their Indian counterparts, and won the subsequent triangular one-day series, which also involved New Zealand A.

McGain, Krejza in race

CRICINFO, undated

Leg-spinner Bryce McGain and off-spinner Jason Krejza will be competing for the specialist spinners' spot in Australia's line-up after coach Tim Nielsen indicated they are likely to field three fast bowlers and a spinner for the Tests.

Australia's attack during their previous Test series, against West Indies earlier this year, comprised Brett Lee, Stuart Clark, Mitchell Johnson, and Stuart MacGill in the first two Tests, while Beau Casson replaced the leg-spinner for the final match. The spinners in the current squad, McGain and Krejza, haven't played a Test yet.

"I think we did a pretty reason-

able job in the West Indies playing on low, flat, pretty slow wickets that spun late in the game, especially the first two Tests, with three quicks and a spinner," Nielsen said. "So I'd expect that's what the mix will be, I think that suits the way we play best. We'll just have to sort out what that mix is and who our spinner is, basically."

"There's still two or three spots people are still trying to force their way into, it depends a little bit on what the Indian team is as well, whether they pick a lot of right-hand batsmen or left-hand batsmen and that might make a little bit of a difference to our spinning options."

Krejza made a bright start to the tour, taking three wickets in a practice game against a Rajasthan Cricket Academy side in Jaipur. McGain however, hasn't had a

proper bowl yet because of a shoulder problem sustained during Australia's tour of India earlier this month. He'll get his opportunity during the tour match against a Board President's XI in Hyderabad starting on October 2.

"He's [McGain] just finishing off [his rehabilitation], it would have been nice to get him going in the two-day game but the physio just felt if we tried to do everything in the competitive game he might be going a little too hard," Nielsen said. "We're trying to keep it controlled, now he should be fit and right to play in the four-day game."

Australia are without the option of Andrew Symonds's offbreaks on this tour but can utilise part-timers Michael Clarke, who bowls left-arm orthodox, and chinaman Simon Katich.

'You have to seize chances'

CRICINFO, undated

VVS Laxman has said India will need to seize every opportunity to win the upcoming home Test series against Australia. "I think you should grab the opportunities and not lose them," he told the Indian news channel CNN-IBN on Monday.

"With other teams you can get back in the game, but against Australia, when you get the opportunity, make sure you are on top". He said batting well would be crucial to put Australia under pressure. "Whenever we have batted well against them and put up a huge score, we have always put

them under pressure," he said. "The Indian spinners then, could also use the home conditions to their advantage."

Laxman, who boasts a formidable record against Australia, said the rivalry would be the best draw for cricket lovers. "We have played against a lot of teams in various series but playing against Australia always, right from the 2001 series to the last one in Australia, went down to the wire," he said. "The highly intense battles were the best cricket for the viewers".

Laxman averages 50.63 in 20 Tests against Australia. He said he enjoyed performing against them, particularly their pace attack, now spearheaded by Brett Lee. "It gives you a lot of satisfaction when you perform

against the best side and the best bowling attack in world cricket".

He said the nature of his batting depended on the situation. "I could play an innings like I did at Sydney [in 2008] where I batted at No. 3 and went after the bowling". Laxman scored a brisk 109 off 142 balls in that match, which India lost by 122 runs. "I could also play an innings like the one in Perth where I batted with the tail and got 79 which was very useful in the context of the game as India won by 72 runs".

Laxman, who played for Rest of India against Delhi in the Irani Trophy recently, said he was looking forward to a highly-competitive series. "It's going to be an intense series. So I'd like to do my bit and help India win the series".

Ronaldinho the difference

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Brazilian Adriano and Argentine Julio Cruz came on for centre-back Materazzi and winger Alessandro Mancini in a typical Mourinho substitution.

Inter's task was made tougher when Nicolas Burdisso was sent off with a quarter of an hour left after picking up a second yellow card.

Mourinho brought on Dejan Stankovic with his final throw of the dice and he forced Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati into parrying a vicious volley before Adriano blasted the follow-up over the bar.

In a thrilling finale, Materazzi was shown a red card for berating the referee from the sideline and Milan substituted Andrei Shevchenko forced Julio Cesar into a fine save before Adriano headed wide from inside the six-yard box.

Mourinho refused to comment

on the referee and defended his attacking substitutions.

"I don't think either side deserved to win more than the other, they scored a goal so well done Milan," he said. "I'm not talking about the referee, I want to be on the bench for the next game."

"I'm not afraid, when I'm not happy with the result I take risks. Unfortunately with 10 men I can't make more attacking changes."

Lazio have been the surprise team of this season and their fourth victory in five matches ensured their place at the top.

Macedonia forward Goran Pandev and a brace from scudetto top scorer Mauro Zarate, one from the spot, put them 3-0 up before nine-man Torino scored an injury time consolation goal from a Nicolas Amoroso penalty.

Lazio coach Delio Rossi said there was still more to come from

hizable-toppers.

"I'm happy to be the coach of players who give their all and play to their best," he said.

"It seemed easy today but Torino played well. I thought in the first half they played better than us but for the rest of the game it was all Lazio."

"We have worked hard and this group can develop and improve as we're missing important players like (Tommaso) Rocchi and (Francesco) Matuzalem."

In the capital, last season's runners-up AS Roma won for only the second time this season in a 2-0 home success over Atalanta.

Centre-back Cristian Panucci opened the scoring through a deflected strike before Montenegro forward Mirko Vucinic added the second with a slick turn and shot.

SA denies Vaughan reports

CRICINFO, undated

South Australia have denied reports in the weekend's newspapers that Michael Vaughan will look to them to provide him with a chance to regain his place in the England side.

Vaughan, who was today left out of the squad to tour India, was linked with the state, with former Yorkshire team-mate Darren Lehmann being touted as the middle-man in the deal.

However, Jamie Cox, South Australia's high performance manager, ruled out such a move. "This is categorically not the case," Cox said. "The Redbacks have had no conversations with Vaughan regarding his recruitment to the side."

"I am not familiar with any conversations Lehmann may have had with Vaughan regarding playing at grade level, and this may well be an option for him. But he has never been considered as a candidate for the Redbacks this season and he will not be playing for South Australia."

Vaughan may still look to grade cricket as a way back, but while the standard of cricket is high, it would not give him a first-class platform to kick-start his international career.

Ramos not buckling yet

INTERNET, undated

Tottenham Hotspurs manager Juande Ramos does not believe his job is under threat despite a 2-0 away defeat to Portsmouth on Sunday, a result which means Spurs are now enduring their worst start to a season for 53 years.

Ramos insists he has the confidence of the Tottenham board but with four defeats and two draws from the opening six Premier League fixtures Spurs are bottom of the table and the fans are growing impatient.

Goals from Jermain Defoe and Peter Crouch, both former Spurs players, gave Pompey a comfortable win at Fratton Park on Sunday where a lacklustre display from the Tottenham players drew howls of derision from the travelling supporters who chanted "You don't know what you're doing" at Ramos.

With just two points from a possible 18 Tottenham are in a worse position than they were at the same stage last season, a poor start which led to Martin Jol's sacking by an impatient Spurs board.

While Ramos remains phlegmatic about the club's current plight he has admitted that he senses the pressure is mounting, saying: "My job does not depend on me. We have a board and a chairman who decide that sort of thing".

Ramos, who won the Carling Cup with Spurs last season, bemoaned refereeing decisions which he feels are exacerbating the club's situation: "Things are going against us and nobody is helping us. Everyone is quite upset about it."

"For example, we lost an appeal on a penalty here (at Fratton Park) and they got one in a similar incident. We went 1-0 down but could have equalised before they got their second. Against Wigan, too, critical decisions did not go our way."

Attempting to put a positive spin on the situation Ramos said: "I feel I have the confidence of the board. We speak regularly and we are working together to resolve matters," said Ramos.

Defeat in the UEFA Cup against Wisla Krakow, when Spurs defend a narrow 2-1 first-leg lead in Poland, could leave Ramos under unbearable pressure.

Mashud blames

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that's why I was not considered for the national team for a long time. I don't want to blame the board, which showed enough courtesy, for my retirement."

He requested the board to create an atmosphere from where one player can get the opportunity to finish his career with satisfaction.

"Actually because of our structure we never know when we should think about our career. We always love to talk about the future and it has just unbalanced our cricket. I will not blame any foreign coach rather our selectors should be blamed for creating a crisis in our cricket," he said.

"I think few of our players joined ICL because of the current selectors' carelessness. The atmosphere in the current national team is really not healthy because nobody feels secured now. You can't enjoy the game if you are always scared about your future," he added.

"If I was made a selector in future, I would try to unite the cricketers and bring the atmosphere that now prevails in the Rajshahi team whose players are always committed and cordial," he promised.

Mashud immediate dream is to emulate his father's feat.

"My father was a footballer with a long 20 years career and I also want to follow in my father's footsteps and complete my cricket career spanning 20 years this year," said Mashud when asked how long he will play in domestic cricket.

Shah, Swann win places

CRICINFO, undated

OWAIS SHAH AND GRAEME SWANN have been named in England's 15-man squad for the forthcoming two-Test tour of India.

Middlesex star Shah picked Young Cricketer of the Year Ravi Bopara to the last batting spot after a prolific campaign.

Uncapped Nottinghamshire spinner Swann has been chosen to back up Monty Panesar and Sussex wicketkeeper Matt Prior has also been recalled.

With former captain Michael Vaughan not considered due to a lack of form, Shah will get the chance to fight for a third Test cap.

His debut came in India two years ago when he stepped in for the ill Alastair Cook and struck an imperious 88 in the series-leveleving victory in Mumbai.

"Our decision to pick Owas Shah was based on the fact that he is an excellent player of spin who played a superb innings in India on his Test debut two years ago," said national selector Geoff Miller.

"It's a further opportunity for him to build on his success with the one-day side this year and his inclusion in the squad will create real competition for places within the batting unit."

It is anticipated that Prior will now assume the role of number one gloveman in all forms of the game, and the four-man selection

panel have sought to emphasise their faith in Tim Ambrose as his most natural competitor by adding him as limited-overs cover for the seven-match series which precedes the Test tour.

That is a move which will disappoint supporters of James Foster, who has built a strong case for a recall. According to the England camp, he was not picked for either the full tour or the performance squad due to a shoulder injury.

"Matt Prior has enjoyed an impressive domestic season with Sussex and having re-established himself in the England one-day side, he will now compete with Tim Ambrose for the position of Test wicketkeeper," said Miller.

"Matt remains our first-choice keeper in the one-day game, but Tim will join the squad in India as reserve wicketkeeper for the duration of the one-day series."

With a second-string side also on the subcontinent during the tour and linking up with the full party for the second Test in Mumbai, England resisted the temptation to add a third spinner, relying on off-spinner Swann.

Yorkshire all-rounder Adil Rashid, whose leg spin reaped 62 wickets in Division One of the County Championship, will be among that group of developing players on standby for the Tests should injury or illness strike.

"The inclusion of Swann as off spinner provides us with a right-arm/left-arm slow bowling combination which we believe can be

effective in India," added Miller.

"Graeme has bowled well in tandem with Monty Panesar when they were at Northamptonshire together and he will be keen to renew the partnership this winter."

Miller backed Bopara, Foster and Rashid to bounce back from their tour disappointment.

"Everyone's unlucky when they aren't playing but they will show character and they will keep knocking on the door and they will have to take the opportunity when they get it," Miller said.

"We make sure we are fair with everyone. I talked to James (Foster) and he knows where he stands. It is unfortunate for him, but I'm sure he'll continue to work at his game."

"Ravi (Bopara) has worked on his game really well this year and it was a tough decision and unfortunately Bopara missed out. I'm sure he'll bounce back."

"Adil Rashid has bowled very well towards end of year. There's a long time spent on selecting these sides."

England travel to India ahead of the first Test in Ahmedabad on December 11. The second Test begins in Mumbai on December 19.

SQUAD

Kevin Pietersen (captain), Tim Ambrose (wicketkeeper), James Anderson, Ian Bell, Stuart Broad, Paul Collingwood, Alastair Cook, Andrew Flintoff, Steve Harmison, Monty Panesar, Matt Prior (wicketkeeper), Owas Shah, Ryan Sidebottom, Andrew Strauss, Graeme Swann.

Jankovic eyes top spot

Tennis

AFP, Beijing

Serbia's Jelena Jankovic, fresh off her win at the China Open, says she is determined to finish the year as the WTA's top player and is eyeing Grand Slam glory next season.

The world number two, now just 21 points behind Serena Williams at the top of the rankings, beat Svetlana Kuznetsova in straight sets on Sunday, avenging her defeat the previous week in Tokyo at the hands of the Russian.

Jankovic also made up for defeat in the China Open final last year where she lost to a set and 5-1 -- and had match point -- over underdog Agnes Szavay.

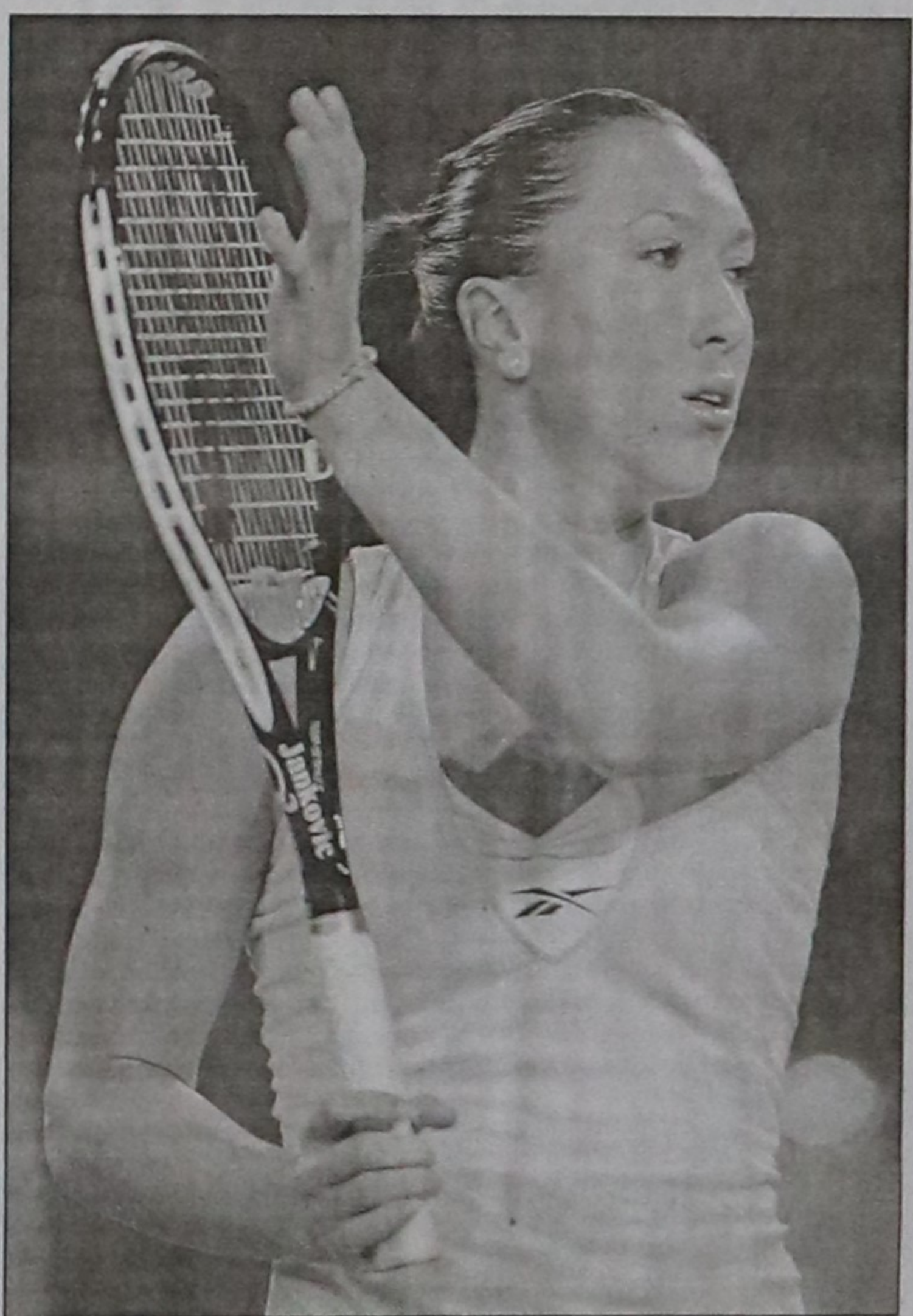
But the Serbian, who briefly

reached number one in August, insisted that topping the rankings was of secondary importance to winning the race to amass the most points in 2008 before the season-ending championships in Doha.

She is currently atop that list at 4,055 points, ahead of US Open champion Williams at 3,680.

"I'm happy to win the title of course. I'm coming very close to regaining that number one spot," Jankovic said following her 6-3, 6-2 win over Kuznetsova in Beijing.

"I'm not really thinking about the number one ranking in the moment. I'm just playing one match at a time and working hard at my game and really trying to develop something and improve some technique in my game, which is the most important thing for me," she shedded.



JELENA JANKOVIC

"Of course, I'd love to come back to the number one position and most importantly end the year as the number one player."

The 23-year-old Jankovic has insisted she feels under no pressure to win her first Grand Slam, saying time is on her side.

"I'll work very hard in the off-season and try to get stronger and fitter and try to bring my tennis into the next level and hopefully I can win a Grand Slam next year," she said.

The next stop on Jankovic's schedule is Stuttgart this week, where Williams is also in the draw.

Meanwhile, Andy Roddick captured his 26th ATP title in the men's competition in Beijing after a difficult couple of matches in which he struggled to see off Bjorn Phau in the semi-final and Dudi Sela in the final, ranked 137 and 92 at the time of the matches.

Roddick's three-set win in the final means he moves up to sixth place in the ATP 2008 Race as he bids to qualify for the season-ending Masters Cup in Shanghai for a fifth time.

Aside from the winners, China's Zheng Jie made headlines here, matching the best-ever performance at the tournament by a Chinese player by reaching the semi-finals.

On the way to the last four, she beat French Open champion and number two seed Ana Ivanovic, whom she also shocked at Wimbledon.

Sachin scoffs

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"We are scheduled to get to Delhi in just under a month's time but the advice we're getting is that the things that need to be happening are happening," CA spokesman Peter Young said.

"We're not aware of any advice that says we need to change our security processes."

Australia cancelled a scheduled Test tour of Pakistan in March due to security concerns and were also one of the teams that forced the Champions Trophy there to be delayed by a year.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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