

Tsonga battles to a win

AFP, Madrid
Australian Open finalist Jo-Wilfried Tsonga went back to work erasing his reputation as the forgotten man of 2008 with a Wednesday fightback victory into the third round of the Madrid Masters.

The Frenchman ranked 14th recovered from 3-5 down in the final set to advance past Spaniard Marcel Granollers 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

Tsonga made a name for himself despite losing the Melbourne grand slam final in January to Novak Djokovic, then found himself undergoing knee surgery a few months later.

As he plays in his third event since returning - he won the Bangkok title last month - Tsonga says he's got nothing to prove, except to himself.

"I don't feel forgotten," said Tsonga, who will next face the winner from second seed Roger Federer and Radek Stepanek. "But the injury was very difficult for me."

"I've only played 10 or 11 events and I'm ranked 15th in the world - what would have happened had I been healthy and played 20?"

"It's not really important to me if I'm remembered or not right now. All I want to do is to play my tennis and try to do the best possible on the court."

Tsonga's win was the 25th of his season against 10 defeats.

In a second-round shock in the Spanish capital, American qualifier Robby Ginepri put out Russian fifth seed Nikolay Davydenko in a 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 decision.

The number 63 had a history in Madrid, reaching the semi-finals in 2005 and next faces Frenchman Gilles Simon.

Davydenko came in intent on rescuing his season after playing the Moscow quarterfinals last week.

ECB boss

FROM PAGE 17
"I like the idea of providing the opportunity with our fabulous grounds and our huge ethnic minority populations who are keen to see their own heroes. And it may be in the interests of cricket, that's the most important thing for me."

There is currently some uncertainty over the scheduling of Tests, given the emergence of the Twenty20 variant which has thrown into doubt Sri Lanka's tour of England next spring while there are security concerns regarding matches in Pakistan.

Clarke said the ICC must seek to protect Test cricket. He told TWC: "There is a strong awareness within the ICC of how important Test cricket is and of the importance of looking after it (but) there is only so much I can do."

Mohali awaits

FROM PAGE 17
To the slow bowlers. Off-spinner Jason Krejza is also available, although he failed to shine in a warm-up game in Hyderabad before the first Test.

The action off the field has heated up ahead of the Test, with Indian paceman Zaheer Khan doubting Australia's bowling ability and Ponting retorting by saying only his team played aggressive cricket throughout.

Lee echoed his captain's views. "We are proud of the way we played. We could have taken more wickets on the last day but that was not to be."

"We have come to win matches and hopefully we will turn things around and win the match here as well as the series."

"There are a lot of things India can say -- that they had a mental win -- but in hindsight we are very happy with the way we played."

"It's only been one match, so the guys who have not had a chance to fire have three more games to get going."

The Mohali Test will be followed by matches in Delhi and Nagpur.

So close

FROM PAGE 17
since the last one-day match against Australia in Darwin last month.

The spin department was always going to be the Tigers' key in the series and although Abdur Razzak did a good job in the first game, his 25-run final over probably cost them the second one-dayer and ultimately the series.

From the other end, Shakib Al Hasan did the banker's job quite well as he conceded only 3.03 runs per over in the three match series.

Their back-up was pretty good too in the form of Nayeem Islam. For a man who started to bowl seriously in the last two seasons, Nayeem could make the spinning all-rounder's place his own after Mahbubullah Riyad proved ineffective with both bat and ball.

Zunaed Siddiqui would remember fondly his brilliant diving catch in the slips in the second match in Mirpur. He took two more in the same game but his collision in the same game with Razzak would remain the only black spot in an otherwise successful fielding unit.

The series loss would be engulged by many from the past and each and every future defeat but in a time when the country's cricket suffered due to the ICL saga, the victory in the first one-dayer would remain as memorable as any in the last 15 years.



Abahani paddler Soma makes a backhand return during yesterday's match against Gazipur in the National Lubricants table tennis tournament at the Engineers Recreation Centre.

Kumble slams media

AFP, New Delhi

India skipper Anil Kumble on Wednesday lashed out at the media for making "uncharitable comments" on his form and fitness during the drawn opening Test against Australia.

The veteran leg-spinner conceded 160 runs in 51 wicketless overs, bowling only eight overs in the second innings because of a sore shoulder. It was his worst-ever performance in 131 Tests.

"Over the past few days, given all the media attention I have received before and during the match, with some uncharitable comments on my fitness and retirement and performance as a player and captain, it does seem like I'm back in Australia again," Kumble wrote in his column in the Hindu newspaper.

"That time saw me unfortunately having to split my time between playing cricket and handling a host of unnecessary off-the-field issues, instead of being able to concentrate on playing the game and handling my team."

"I didn't really expect to have to go through this all over again on my home turf."

Kumble was referring to an ill-tempered series in Australia earlier this year that the hosts won 2-1 amid deteriorating relations between the two sides.

India, unhappy with umpiring decisions in the second Test in Sydney, almost abandoned the tour when all-rounder Andrew Symonds levelled racial abuse charges against spinner Harbhajan Singh.

"Also, there's been high praise for the way Australia played (in the first Test)," said Kumble, the world's third-highest wicket-taker with 616 scalps.

"Well, good for the Aussies, but I have a point to make here: In all the talk of aggressive, champion sides, it might make sense for someone to ask why 83 overs on a fifth-day pitch wasn't enough time to finish the job."

Australia grabbed just four wickets in 73 overs on the last day of the opening Test in Bangalore on Monday before play was called off due to bad light with 10 overs remaining.

India finished at 177-4 chasing a 299-run target. "It's perhaps easy to say one must ignore the media but for any normal person that's a difficult task,"

given the media's overwhelming presence in cricket," said Kumble. "I would really appreciate if certain people realise that cricket is not spoken, it's played and we, the Indian team, are out there to play it."

The Indian skipper said he was optimistic he would regain fitness for the second Test, which starts in Mohali on Friday.

"I am hopeful the shoulder injury I picked up during the match should be fine by the second Test and that it will be business as usual thereafter," said Kumble, who turns 38 on Friday.

"I can't promise things I have no control over, but the one thing that I can guarantee is that I won't give up the fight. We won't."

"The belief that I have in my team, and the belief that the team has in me is what matters the most. When I decide to make a final bow, I'll go on my own terms."

Speculation over the careers of five senior players, including Kumble, mounted after India's 2-1 defeat in a Test series in Sri Lanka in August. The others were Sourav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Venkatesh Laxman.

Ganguly, 36, has already announced he will retire after the ongoing series.

Momentum is with us: Lee

CRICINFO, undated

Like a couple of bickering school children, India say Australia were too defensive in the first Test and the visitors believe the home team didn't try to win from an enticing situation.

As the teams battle for any advantage following the Bangalore draw, Brett Lee is in no doubt over who will enter Friday's second match in Mohali in the more confident mood.

Lee said before practice on Wednesday that the way India batted on the final day, chasing 299 in 83 overs, was revealing of their outlook and insisted Australia were the only ones trying for victory.

"It appeared they didn't want to go after the total and were happy to have a draw," Lee said. "It shows we're playing in the right style of cricket that the Aussies want to play."

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ways to improve their tactics and how to stay focused against the tailenders. The 80-run partnership between Harbhajan Singh and Zaheer in the first innings turned India's total from a wanky 232 for 7 into a useful 360 and was the point where Australia's dominant position slipped.

"As a whole bowling group we probably weren't patient enough [against the tail], he said. "The wicket wasn't capable of getting the ball above shoulder height, so the whole scare tactic, the intimidation, wasn't playing a cause because the wicket was so dead."

"We have to make sure we have better plans. Sometimes the tail wags, it wagged when we were batting well."

Australia have a concern over Stuart Clark's right elbow and he will not bowl until Thursday. The injury prevented him from throwing over-arm in the first Test and if he is ruled unfit, the left-arm fast bowler Doug Bollinger, who toured West Indies earlier in the year, and Victoria's Peter Siddle will be considered for a debut.

Lee recovered well from delivering 37 overs in Bangalore and was not concerned that he and Clark combined for only three wickets in the game. "I was really happy with the way the ball came out, I couldn't have asked for anything else," he said. "It would've been nice to look up at the scoreboard and see a three or four-for, but that's cricket."

"As the opening pair we just need to make sure we're creating as many chances as possible, and we did that, especially on the last morning. Provided we're doing that, then we're happy."

The lack of carry to the wicketkeeper Brad Haddin has been a problem for Australia -- he conceded 39 byes -- and has resulted in the repositioning of the slips cordon. Catches behind the wicket are a staple dismissal in Australia, but they are rarer in India, especially with the visitors employing an at-the-stumps line.

"The hardest thing over here is you notice pretty much from the first couple of overs that the ball doesn't even carry through to the keeper," he said. "So you've got the keeper who might stand back 25 yards, and take the ball around chest or waist height, and all of a sudden the pace hasn't changed but the distance has. He might be at 15 yards and the reaction time's a lot quicker."

Closer slips mean the fielders have to work in a smaller area, reducing their impact. "The further you go back the more space you can cover, so that's one thing to be aware of as a bowler," he said. "The ball that might usually go to second slip might be actually going past second now because they're so close."

Lee also wants to make greater use of the new ball, which he has learned swings for a maximum of six overs. "You see how the Indians bowl, seam up the first two or three overs then they hold it across the seam, so it gets the ball roughed up and starts to reverse," he said. "It's one of those things which we have to make sure we understand the way it works over here."

Meet from Sept 24 to Oct 5

FROM PAGE 17
early next year in order to facilitate preparations by teams, broadcasters, commercial partners "and other stakeholders".

The Board added that a full schedule including match locations "will be announced in due course".

ICC President David Morgan said: "We are delighted to have slotted the ICC Champions Trophy into the FTP (future tours programme) in 2009 thus maintaining the primacy of ICC events, and we now look forward to staging an outstanding, memorable event next September/October."

"The ICC Champions Trophy is part of a host of great ICC tournaments taking place next year, including the ICC Women's World Cup, the ICC World Cup Qualifier and the ICC World Twenty20, for both men and women."

"All these events during the ICC Centenary year will showcase cricket in the best possible light and will help to ensure that our great game remains a strong sport growing stronger."

ICC Chief Executive Haroon Lorgat added: "I'm hugely encouraged by the spirit of togetherness and teamwork shown by our members in ensuring we have found a place for the ICC Champions Trophy in next year's calendar."

"The tournament, with its new format of the top eight teams playing in a short, sharp event, is vitally important for the world game," said Lorgat, adding that Sri Lanka remained the stand-by venue should the security review in February 2009 be negative.

This year's championships were postponed after South Africa pulled out, amid doubts over the participation of Australia, England and New Zealand.

But even the postponed Champions Trophy appeared in danger when both India and Australia objected to October 2009 dates as it clashed with Australia's

seven-day international tour of the sub-continent.

And as per ICC's agreement with the various sponsors, they have to hold a postponed tournament within one year of the original dates.

The new dates were finally worked out to the satisfaction of all boards involved, but the tournament had to be reduced to 12 days.

"Given how packed the cricket calendar is, rescheduling dates is always a difficult task," said Morgan.

Morgan also confirmed that the 2010 Champions Trophy will be held as scheduled in the West Indies.

Lorgat denied there were any moves within the ICC to change the format of the Champions Trophy, or to make it a quadrennial tournament.

"There has been some speculation about a change in format, but that's not true. We believe the current format is doing well, and reducing it to 12 days should work out well."

FROM PAGE 17
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He took the baton from Aftab Ahmed, who struck an 11-ball 24. He moved into his 90s with successive sixes against former Kiwi medium-pace Harris in the 18th over. He raced closer to the magical three-figure mark with a four down the third-man boundary off Razzak before picking up his 100th run with a single down to mid-on.

Kapali scored his first 50 off 38 balls. Former Bangladesh left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique also joined Kapali in the late fireworks with a huge six over mid-wicket off Boje.

The only blemish of Kapali's innings was when he miscued an attempted pull straight to fine leg while he was on 71. But Sahabuddin, who had conceded 16 runs in the previous over, spilled the chance.

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FROM PAGE 17
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Alok lights

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The hosts' batting was especially dismal.

"It started badly," Winter admitted.

"Most were out for a duck and those who did score didn't stay in much longer."

"The Germans eventually realised they had won and cheered. Later that evening they were awarded the ashes."

A rematch is scheduled for next year in Germany.

Bangladesh take

FROM PAGE 17
Merdeka Cup, where a second-string Bangladesh side lost to a Zimbabwe XI, Indonesia and Singapore.

"I have seen Mozambique training for half an hour today and they looked good. They are not top players of the country but it would be a very competitive test," said the former national footballer.

"Our training was hampered due to heavy rain and we will hold a brief warm-up session tomorrow morning. We will decide the starting eleven after that," informed Manik.

He, however, hinted at a change from Bangladesh's only warm-up match at home against a selected XI.

"Sharif is going to play in place of Pranotosh in the midfield but there could be other changes if I feel necessary."

"If the boys give their best in the match, we hope to do something unexpected of us in the group stage. We want to change the overall impression the nation has on the national team here."

Although fixtures of the eight-team tournament, which kicked off yesterday with the match between hosts Malaysia and Nepal, have been revised due to late arrival of Group A teams, Bangladesh will play Myanmar (October 18) and Vietnam (October 20) on schedule.

All Bangladesh's group games will be played at the Shah Alam Stadium.

Team leader and Bangladesh Football Federation vice-president Badal Roy was a bit worried by the weather as it rained on both days during the team's training. He however, said that the players were in sound condition and enjoying the local food and hospitality.

Bangladesh probable line-up (5-3-2): Aminul, Hassan Al Mamun, Ariful, Rajani, Sujjan, Waly, Sharif, Arman Aziz, Matuir Muna, Emily and Robin.

Russel back

FROM PAGE 17
defender headed a cross by Anwar just wide of the unguarded far post.

Four minutes later, Weah set a backpack for substitute Tutul, whose placing shot was foiled by a diving Russelgoalie Azam.

Ighir Mohamed inspired a counter attack three minutes from time when the Moroccan sent Tanvir racing down the left flank. Tanvir managed to cut the ball in front of goal but Mitul's legworks blocked Alfaz's feeble effort from handshaking distance to keep the scoreline slim.

Yellow cards: Aminul (Russel) and Shahjada (Arambagh)

TEAMS

RUSSEL: Azam, Aminul, Zahirul, Bourdip, Parvez Babu, Mobarak, Ighir, Nurul Islam, Munwar (Tanvir), Alfaz and Youness.

ARAMBAGH: Mitul, Monu, Ratan, Kaba, Akram, Shahjada, Turjo (Moudud), Nayan, Imrul, Anwar (Tutul) and Nicodemus (Weah). Referee: Shahidul Islam.

Sense of optimism in ICL

AFP, Hyderabad

A sense of cautious optimism permeated the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL) camp here on Wednesday soon after news came in from Dubai that the International Cricket Council (ICC) has asked the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to meet ICL representatives with former Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar terming it as a "terrific development".

An ICC statement issued after a meeting of the board of the world body in Dubai Tuesday night said the board "received an application for approval from the ICL and resolved to adjourn its consideration to allow for discussions between Shashank Manohar, President of BCCI, and representatives of ICL."

"Manohar agreed to provide the ICC board with a full written report of those discussions in due course," said the statement.

On the first day of the two-day ICC board meeting, there was a discussion on new regulations

"governing official and unofficial cricket" following work by a sub-committee consisting of David Becker, ICC head of legal affairs, Shashank Manohar, Giles Clarke, Lalit Modi (Chairman of BCCI-approved Indian Premier League) and Norman Airendse, it added.

ICL executive board member Kiran More said "it certainly is very good news for us. I hope the Indian cricket board takes a positive attitude".

Asked on the possibility of ICC according "authorised unofficial" cricket status to ICL, More, former Indian wicketkeeper, said even this would "help our boys who will at least get an opportunity to play domestic cricket".

Bashar, who along with 11 other cricketers of Bangladesh has been slapped with a ban by that country's cricket board for joining the ICL, hailed the news of ICC asking the Indian cricket board to talk to ICL.

"It's a terrific development. I'm excited at the possibility of the meeting. If the differences are resolved, it will be in the best interest of not only ICL cricketers but also cricketers all over the world. Then, they will have a wider

choice," said Bashar, the captain of Dhaka Warriors which play their second ICL T20 match against holders Hyderabad Heroes tonight.

ICL officials are guardedly optimistic about the change in Indian cricket board's attitude towards the rebel cricket league after initially having refused to do anything with it, banning the players who joined ICL and stopping the pension money of former cricketers who are associated with ICL.

What will be the agenda of the possible meeting between Indian cricket board and the ICL? Will the ICL ask for withdrawal of ban on players who have joined it or restoration of pension on former players involved with it? These are questions that are likely to come up between the two sides, BCCI and ICL sources said.

What has prompted the change in BCCI's attitude? Sources said some cricketers have told the ICC that they do not want to be bogged down by protracted legal battles against the ban on their players who have joined the ICL.

The Sri Lanka Cricket has already lifted the ban on their cricketers who joined the ICL.

Rio blames Wag culture

AFP, Minsk

Rio Ferdinand has described the "WAG" culture that surrounded England in the days before Fabio Capello took charge as a "circus" and admitted that it was central to the squad's recent failures.

In a remarkably frank interview ahead of a World Cup qualifier with Belarus here on Wednesday, the Manchester United defender savaged the celebrity bubble which peaked during the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany, where the wives and girlfriends (WAGs) of the England squad generated as many headlines as the players themselves.

Underlining the fundamental changes that have been instituted by Capello, England's stand-in captain also hit out at the Italian predecessor, Steve McClaren, and his apparent desire to be best mates with "Wazza" (Wayne Rooney) and "Stevie G" (Steven Gerrard).

"In the past we became a bit of a circus, if I'm honest, in terms of the whole WAG situation," Ferdinand admitted.

"It seems like there was a big show around the whole England squad. It was like watching theatre unfolding and football almost became a secondary element to the main event."

"People were worrying more about what people were wearing and where they were going, rather than the England football team. That then transposed itself into the team."

"This regime in contrast is very water-tight. It feels as if we're going in the right direction."

"I don't want to speak too soon, but you can see we're at the start of something and, hopefully, there'll be bigger rewards than what we've had in the past. Everyone's very focused and attuned to what we want to achieve."

Ferdinand's comments amount to the breaking of a taboo. Until he spoke out, England's players had unanimously maintained that the media circus surrounding the team at

Germany 2006 and subsequently had played no part in their failure to live up to the high expectations vested in what was once termed a "golden generation" of English players.

"I didn't realise it at the time," admitted Ferdinand. "You were caught up in the bubble - we were in the bubble ourselves."

"I'm talking with hindsight. But being somewhere like Baden Baden (England's base in Germany), walking around the town, there were paparazzi everywhere and we were in amongst the press as well - and our families were there too. When you step back and look back at that, you think it was a circus."

With England on track to reach the 2010 finals after missing out on Euro 2008 under McClaren, Ferdinand is confident there will be no mass influx of WAGs into South Africa in two years' time.

"I'm not going to tell the other players what you should or should not do. But, I just think that, as a squad, we were a bit too open in 2006, going out in and around Baden Baden, and probably had too much contact with families."

"Some players may think they'd rather have that contact but I think you're in a tournament - and you don't get many tournaments in your career. To give yourself the best chance, you have to be focused."

With that in mind Ferdinand was delighted when iron-fisted Capello arrived as England manager and produced a list of rules as long as Peter Crouch's right leg.

"When the new manager arrived I just think that it was very much: 'I'm the boss and this is what is happening.' The lads appreciate that and have warned to that because that's what happens at their clubs."

"This new regime is a very, very professional regime. It is very result-orientated. You see how he is on the training ground, in our meetings, that there's a winning mentality there."

"He has a new way of doing things. He isn't shy of telling you what you're doing wrong. That's a big step in the right direction for this team, and that's maybe what we've needed in the past. This squad is in a different frame of mind to the ones I've been in for a while. We've got a very business-like state of mind."

Central to that, according to Ferdinand, is the distance between the players and Capello.

"Do you really know any managers?" he asked. "I don't know the