

V-day tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

Arvind Fernando thumped Komol Roy in straight sets in the qualifying round of the Popular Pharmaceuticals Victory Day tennis tournament at the National Tennis Complex yesterday.

The player from International Club beat Komol 6-1, 6-1 while there were wins for Rafiqul Islam and Bashir Gazi in the men's singles.

In the boys' under-16, Omar Faruque, Biplob Ram and Shuvo won their respective matches.

Oram hits back at McMillan

AFP, Napier

Injury-prone New Zealand all-rounder Jacob Oram hit back Wednesday at suggestions by former teammate Craig McMillan that he seems too ready to pull out of games with injuries.

Former Test player McMillan told New Zealand radio that Oram, who is out of the current Test series against the West Indies with a calf strain, had been wrapped in cotton wool by team management.

"You've always got sore calves, (hamstrings) but you just get on and do it," said McMillan, who retired from Test cricket last year.

"Unfortunately, with Jake's track record... he has missed some games that maybe he could have got through."

Oram, who has now missed five straight Tests through injury, told reporters he did not expect to hear such comments from a former teammate.

"I understand people who have never bowled a ball in anger in their lives having a bit of a go at me for potentially being on the soft side, but it's disappointing to come from an ex-teammate," he said.

"He knows the rigours and the stresses of international cricket and it's a bit rich saying 'if it's 50-50, I don't play'."

The 30-year-old said he had played matches with broken fingers in the past, but he could understand the frustration of fans at his frequent injury absences.

"If they're annoyed, I'm a hundred times worse."

New Zealand coach Andy Moles said Oram was expected to return to the side for the Twenty20 and one-day internationals against the West Indies following the second and final Test starting here Friday.

Bolt the best

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"My coach has told me that I have another two years of progress in front of me and that I have room for improvement. He thinks I can run (200 metres) in under 19 seconds and I have every confidence in him."

Bolt also said that he felt he could better his 100 metres world record of 9.58 secs and confirmed that he is considering targeting Michael Johnson's nine-year-old 400 metres record of 43.18 secs in 2010.

"When I was at school, I ran 45.35 secs - that's not bad. Although the intensive training you need for the 400 metres worries me."

Lanka arrive

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experienced batsman when they announce a 14-member Test squad today.

"There is hardly any chance to see changes in the team except one experienced batsman come into the top order," said chief selector Rafiqul Alam yesterday.

"It's good that our players got the opportunity to play a competitive longer-version match before the series and few players got some runs," he added responding to the national players' performance in the penultimate round of the National Cricket League.

Bangladesh team will start their practice tomorrow under the guidance of coach Jamie Siddons at Mirpur.

SRI LANKA

TEST SQUAD

Mahela Jayawardene (Captain), Kumar Sangakkara (vice-captain), Malinda Warnapura, Michael Vandort, Thilan Samaraweera, T. M. Dilshan, Prasanna Jayawardene (wicketkeeper), Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralidaran, Dhammika Prasad, Chamara Kapugedera, Farveez Maharoof, Dilhara Fernando, Thilina Thushara Miranda and Rangana Herath.

Nadal honoured

Tennis

AFP, Paris

World No.1s Rafael Nadal of Spain and Jelena Jankovic of Serbia were named on Wednesday as World Champions for 2008 by the International Tennis Federation (ITF).

The 22-year-old Nadal, who won the French Open, Wimbledon and Olympic gold in Beijing to dethrone Roger Federer atop the rankings, is the first Spanish man to be named men's World Champion.

"It has been an incredible year for me and I will never forget all that's happened," Nadal said.

"To finish the year ranked No. 1 was really special. At the same time I was proud to win the Olympic gold medal, and help Spain regain the Davis Cup. It has been a wonderful year for Spanish sport, and I am happy to have been part of it."

Jankovic becomes Serbia's first tennis World Champion in singles after securing the year-end No. 1 ranking in a

standout year.

She reached her first Grand Slam final at the US Open, and won more matches on the tour than any other player, capturing four titles in Rome, Beijing, Stuttgart and Moscow.

The 23-year-old also represented her country at the Olympics and in the Fed Cup, where she helped Serbia qualify for the World Group for the first time ever.

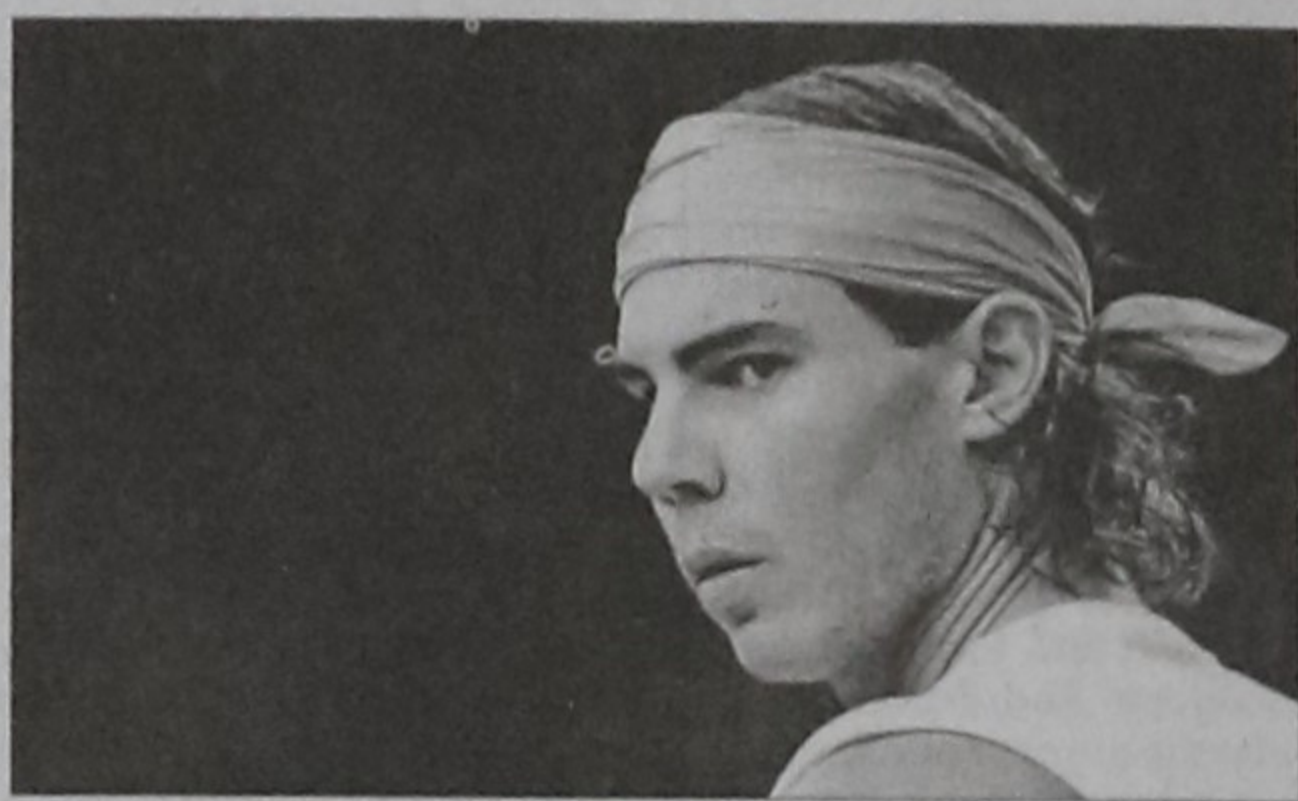
"I am very proud of myself for all I have accomplished in 2008 and am delighted to be named ITF World Champion,"

Jankovic said.

"I worked really hard this year and to finish No.1 is where I want to be and where I want to stay."

"It was also an honour to represent Serbia in the Beijing Olympics and I hope I can achieve further success for my country in Fed Cup."

The ITF also announced that Daniel Nestor of Canada and Nenad Zimonjic of Serbia, and Cara Black of Zimbabwe and Liezel Huber of the United States are the 2008 ITF Doubles World Champions.



RAFAEL NADAL

Lorgat asks officials to get tougher

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive Haroon Lorgat has told Test match referees and umpires to come down hard on slow over-rates and verbal abuse.

Lorgat said on Tuesday he had written to all match referees and umpires on the elite panel, who between them are responsible for controlling nearly all Tests, asking them to be "assertive and proactive" in dealing with the problem areas.

He also stressed the key role of captains in ensuring the game was played in the correct spirit and at the right pace.

The South African, in a statement issued from the ICC's Dubai headquarters, said he wanted to see a continuation of the "feel-good factor" he'd witnessed at first hand in Chennai where India beat England by six wickets in the first Test on Monday.

That match, played only after England returned to India following last month's terror attacks in Mumbai, was widely hailed as a triumph for cricket.

But with what could be a fiery series between Australia and South Africa, the two leading teams in the ICC's Test rankings, about to get underway, Lorgat wanted to see

similar standards of sportsmanship maintained around the world.

"After the recent Test match in Chennai there is a real feel-good factor about the game, and rightly so."

"It's great that the game is in the news for all the right reasons and I want that to carry on."

"That is why I have written to all of the ICC match referees and umpires urging them to be assertive and proactive in dealing with slow over-rates and verbal abuse."

Australia captain Ricky Ponting was widely criticised for his use of part-time bowlers Michael Hussey and Michael Clarke in a bid to make-up for a slow over-rate during a key stage of last month's fourth Test against India in Nagpur, where a 172-run defeat saw the tourists lose the series 2-0.

But Australia still ended up being two overs short of the required over-rate target and, as per ICC's existing regulations, Australia were fined five percent of their match fee for every over not bowled in the required time with Ponting, as captain, fined double in a binding ruling.

Slow over rates have also been blamed, in part, for the recent refusal of British terrestrial broadcasters such as the BBC and Channel Four to enter bids to show England

home Tests because of the lack of certainty regarding playing hours causes too many knock-out problems with the rest of their schedules.

However, at present, offending sides do not suffer a direct penalty during the match -- such as the deduction of runs or wickets -- and many critics argue that current penalties are not tough enough to deal with a widespread problem.

But Lorgat warned: "The ICC is now looking at options to encourage better over-rates and strengthened sanctions against offending teams."

Verbal abuse or 'sledging' has long been a part of cricket's history, although what constitutes amusing 'banter' as opposed to a crude insult has often proved a thorny issue.

Australia are considered to be the masters of what their former captain Steve Waugh liked to call 'mental disintegration' but they insisted during their 2007-08 season they were the injured party, when India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh was accused of racially abusing Andrew Symonds.

"Verbal abuse and slow over-rates have the potential to impact negatively on the way the game is perceived," said Lorgat. "We have seen that in the past and we must do all we can to ensure that doesn't happen in the future."

About time Rahul scored

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"Rahul is a great batsman but his bad phase has gone on for a long time now," said Vengsarkar, a top middle-order batsman of the 1980s.

"I think he needs a break. He can play a few first class games, recapture his form and then return to the side."

"He has played for so long, he will know when to quit."

With India unlikely to tour Pakistan next month due to political tensions between the two nations following the Mumbai attacks, Dravid will have a break until the New Zealand tour in March and April.

With former captains Anil Kumble and Sourav Ganguly

having retired after the recent home series against Australia, it is left to Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and Venkatsai Laxman to fly the flag for the set of elite Indian veterans labelled the 'fab five'.

Tendulkar, 35, the world's most successful Test and one-day batsman, showed during the Chennai Test he was still in prime form with a match-winning 41st century as India pulled off the fourth-highest run chase in history.

Dravid's leg-before-against spinner Graeme Swann and then a tentative edge off Andrew Flintoff in the same match were described as "examples of a muddled mind caught in indecision" by the

Indian Express newspaper.

Dravid, who quit as India captain in September last year to concentrate on his batting, has so far declined to speak on his prolonged slump.

But Tendulkar rushed to offer support for his beleaguered teammate, saying it was too early to write Dravid off.

"He is a great player, not just a good player," said Tendulkar.

"It is a cycle. Sometimes you are at your peak and at other times you are down. It happens to all players at some point."

"Even I have had my ups and downs."

Sourav sings Yuvraj song

PTI, New Delhi

Former Indian captain Sourav Ganguly on Wednesday expressed full confidence in Yuvraj Singh, saying he was sure the Punjab batsman would establish himself as one of the top Test cricketers.

"He is a fine one-day player and I am sure he will establish himself in the Test cricket as well," said Ganguly, who retired after the recent home series against Australia, making way for Yuvraj.

Yuvraj, who returned to Test fold after almost eight months, made 14 and 85 not out in the first Test against England in Chennai.

Ganguly, who is here to play for Bengal to help them make the Super League grade in Ranji Trophy, said he was under no pressure to perform as he had already called it quits.

"I had agreed to play this match to help Bengal make into the Elite League. There is no pressure because I have already retired from international cricket," he said.

"I will be happy to contribute," he said on the eve of their Plate group match against Goa at the Karnail Singh Stadium here.

Ganguly, who went on a high with a 100 under his belt in his final series, felt nostalgic as he talked about his Ranji debut against Delhi.

"I vividly remember my first Ranji Trophy match against Delhi and have some fond memories of domestic cricket. It's been an enjoyable journey," he said.

Honeymoon over for Allen?

AFP, London

Texan billionaire Allen Stanford is set to turn his back on cricket after losing 40 million dollars on his million-dollar-a-man series, a report said Wednesday.

The Daily Mail newspaper said Stanford was poised to end his five-year deal with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) after just a year.

A similar deal with West Indies cricket authorities would also be terminated, the report said.

The report said Stanford had made heavy losses after paying his victorious Stanford Superstars team 20 million dollars for the Twenty20 showdown against England in Antigua last month, while another 20 million dollars went on television and sponsorship deals connected to the event.

Stanford was expected to fund the competition for a further four years, while he was also expected to bankroll the England Premier League Twenty20 tournament from 2009.

A Japanese Odyssey on

AFP, Tokyo

A 59-year-old Japanese comedian embarked on an epic two-year journey Wednesday to run and sail 36,000 kilometres (22,500 miles) around the world and promote Tokyo's bid for the 2016 Olympics.

Kanpei Hazama plans to pass through rival candidate cities Chicago and Madrid, and reach Copenhagen on October 2 next year when the International Olympic Committee chooses the 2016 Summer Games venue at a meeting there. The other bidder is Rio De Janeiro.

Hazama plans to then continue his journey, dubbed an "Earth Marathon" and followed by a television network, which he intends to complete in about two years and three months.

The comic, who has taken part dozens of marathons -- including the 230-kilometre Marathon of the Sands through the Sahara last April -- plans to run about 10 hours a day.

"If I have a stress fracture, I'll rest for medical treatment and then get back on the road. I intend to run 50 km per day," said Hazama, who has been named as an ambassador by Tokyo's Olympic bid committee.

"I'll never give up." Hazama kicked off his odyssey in Osaka and expects to set sail for Los Angeles aboard a 12-metre (40-foot) yacht from the port of Kamogawa near Tokyo on New Year's Day.

His entire journey, which includes 16,000 kilometres by sea, will take him through more than 10 countries, including the United States, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan and China.

Selection headache for England

Cricket

AFP, Mohall

England faced a selection dilemma on Wednesday as they searched for the right combination to force a series-levelling win over India in the final Test here.

The tourists were undecided on whether to include batsman Owais Shah for the match starting on Friday, while the disappointing form of frontline spinner Monty Panesar posed another worry.

England have had little time to recover from India's stunning six-wicket win in the first Test in Chennai on Monday when Sachin Tendulkar's 41st century enabled the hosts to achieve the fourth-highest run chase in history.

Left-hander Panesar, expected to be England's trump card on the final day, failed to take a wicket in the second innings as India reached a seemingly improbable target of 387 with more than 20 overs to spare.

Off-spinner Graeme Swann had a bigger impact, grabbing two wickets in his

first over in Test cricket before removing the rampaging Virender Sehwag and Venkatsai Laxman in the second innings.

With fast bowler Stuart Broad fit after missing the Chennai Test with a hamstring injury, England must choose between Swann and Panesar or drop one seamer from Steve Harmison or James Anderson.

England coach Peter Moores appeared to lean on Panesar, saying the 26-year-old who has claimed 117 wickets in 34 Tests was still developing as a world-class spinner.

"If you look at Monty's record in Test match cricket it compares very favourably to a lot of spinners who have started out and he is still very young in the game," said Moores.

"I don't think it was as easy in Chennai as the pitch looked, otherwise India's Harbhajan Singh and Amit Mishra would have run riot and they did not."

"I have sympathy for Monty, who probably has not had a competitive game for four months."

"As you go through your overs you get into a rhythm, so

that's quite challenging for someone who is suddenly charged with the job of bowling out an Indian team that is playing very good cricket."

Shah, who hit three half-centuries during his team's 5-0 loss to India in last month's one-day series, returns to contention after Ian Bell managed only 17 and seven in Chennai.

Moores admitted the team management faced a tough choice over the next two days as it mulled over a suitable batting order.

"It was probably one of the toughest decisions to not pick Shah in Chennai because he played beautifully in the one-day series," said Moores.

"But we have also got very good players in the Test team. You have to make a decision on what you think is the best team for England at any given time."

"You are loyal to your players when you think it's right to be loyal and when you think it's right to give someone else a chance, you do that."

Shah played the last of his two Tests against the West Indies at Lord's in May 2007 but has been a regular member of the one-day team.

Adjustment key

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the ODI series in Zimbabwe.

"That is the challenge international cricketers face today," Jayawardene said. "You just have to make the necessary adjustments to suit the type of game you have to play. It's a good challenge to have as cricketers. It will assess a lot of things like your character and integrity."

He said regardless of the quality of the opposition, Sri Lanka needed to improve their own standards. "Once we realise where we are right now we don't want to drop our standards. That's where the motivation comes."

Ajantha Mendis has been ruled out of the Tests, but has apparently shown remarkable improvement. Ranjith Nananayakaraswami, in the team physio, said that Mendis -- who suffered severe soft tissue damage on his right ankle -- had responded well to treatment and there was a possibility that he could be fit

to play in the second Test starting in Chittagong on January 3.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) sources stated that the team was keen to take Mendis along as an additional player so that he could continue his treatment. The final decision lies with the SLC's interim committee, who will have to bear the extra expenses.

Regardless of Mendis's recovery, Jayawardene said that it is not individuals that win matches, but the team. "Ajantha's been a brilliant cricketer and a match-winner for us. His loss will definitely be felt, but at the same time I don't think it will affect us a lot. In Ajantha's absence we have to play a different combination and a different game. In the past we had (Muttiah) Muralidaran injured for some time and we have somehow managed without him. Ajantha's absence affords another bowler to step in."

India improved most: Misbah

CRICINFO, undated

Misbahul Haq, the Pakistan vice-captain, believes India is the most improved side in international cricket and hopes the team tours Pakistan next month in what he expects will be an exciting series.

"It has a very strong batting line-up but I must say that we have a very good bowling attack," Misbah said. "All of the [Pakistan] team players are hoping that the series does take place. We've had a lean year with no Test matches and it's very important for us to play strong teams like India."

The series is in doubt following a deterioration in relations between the two countries, a fallout from the Mumbai attacks which India alleges had links to elements in Pakistan. Though India's foreign affairs ministry is yet to take a final decision on the tour, the sports minister is not in favour of the team travelling to Pakistan.

Exciting day at WACA

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light towers grew across the ground, looking a high-class batsman, especially when hitting Jacques Kallis for a straight six. His lapse came on 46 when Ntini took the second new ball and he slashed to deep point.

Like Katich's display in the morning, Australia were desperate for the contributions of Clarke, Symonds and Haddin to secure their total. South Africa's bid to topple the world champions, who are still trying to prove they are an all-conquering force, started in stunning style with Dale Steyn and Makhaya Ntini frightening the home batsmen. However, Katich wasn't scared and despite some uncomfortable fends he out-performed his more highly-respected teammates during a crucial 83.

Clarke was streaky at times during his 62, but his exit was costly. An over after Katich was lbw to a Morkel full toss that was heading for leg stump, Clarke chose a poor time to loft

the spinner Paul Harris and was caught at mid-on.

Australia needed Katich's fight on a pitch that was not as brutal as expected, but still offered enough bounce to make the fast men smile, especially when running in to the tail-enders. Katich, who grew up in Perth before moving to New South Wales, made his first Test at his old home ground memorably, settling well after watching Matthew Hayden, Ricky Ponting and Michael Hussey depart by the sixth over.

He drove hard, relaxing with a push through cover off Steyn for a boundary, and then swung three fours in a row from Kallis. A sliced cut carried over the rope at third-man to bring up his half-century and he followed with a textbook shot through the gully.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the first Test between Australia and South Africa at the Western Australia

Cricket Association ground in Perth on Wednesday.

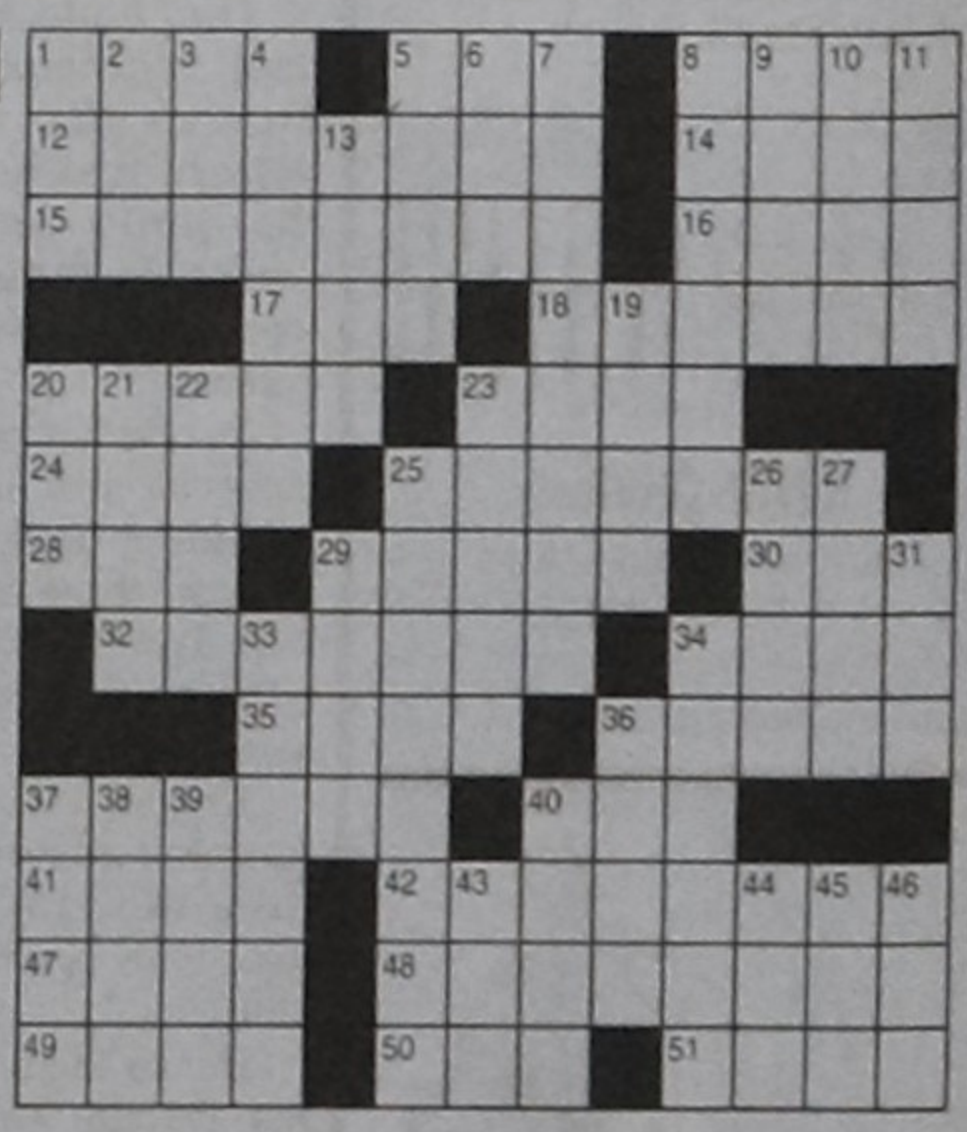
AUSTRALIA: First innings
Hayden c Smith b Ntini 12
Katich lbw b Morkel 83
Ponting c de Villiers b Ntini 0
Hussey c de Villiers b Steyn 0
Clarke c Smith b Harris 62
Symonds c McKenzie b Harris 57
Haddin c Duminy b Ntini 46
Lee c Duminy b Steyn 29
Krejazza not out 19
Johnson lbw b Morkel 18
Extras: (lb-7, w-3, nb-5) 15
Total: (For 9 wks in 89 overs) 341
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-14, 3-15, 4-164, 5-166, 6-259, 7-298, 8-303, 9-341
To bat: Sidle

Bowler O M R W
Ntini 18 1 66 3
Steyn 18 2 71 2
Kallis 15 2 65 0
Morkel 17 1 62 2
Harris 21 2 70 2
SOUTH AFRICA: Smith, McKenzie, Amla, Kallis, Duminy, De Villiers, Boucher, Morkel, Ntini, Steyn, Harris.
Toss: Australia.
Umpires: Aleem Dar and Asoka de Silva.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 37 No. 5 Genetic acids, 21 Wander to 22 Opposed to 23 Repairs Web 25 Charlie McCarthy's pal Snerd 26 Second-hand place (Lat.) 27 Note to the staff 29 Say "bow-wow" 30 Stead 31 Donkey 32 Extreme disgust 34 "Yipee!" 36 Ukraine capital 37 Iodine-rich seaweed 38 MP's quarry 39 Part of N.B. 40 From the beginning 43 U.N. work agcy. 44 Chowd down on 45 Parcel of land 46 -- Lanka

DOWN 1 Rotating "Miss -- Regrets" 2 Blackbird 3 Proscribe 4 Berates job 5 Sleep 40 The stuff Web address 41 Lambs' suffix 7 Strict disciplinary 8 In the same place (Lat.) 9 Gentlewoman 10 Stead 11 Rebuff a masher 13 Cole Porter's "Miss -- Regrets" 14 Labyrinth 15 Bigfoot's Asian cousin 16 Notion 17 Fleur-de-de 18 Straight things 1 Rotating "Miss -- Regrets" 2 Blackbird 3 Proscribe 4 Berates job 5 Sleep 40 The stuff Web address 41 Lambs' suffix 7 Strict disciplinary 8 In the same place (Lat.) 9 Gentlewoman 10 Stead 11 Rebuff a masher 13 Cole Porter's "Miss -- Regrets" 14 Labyrinth 15 Bigfoot's Asian cousin 16 Notion 17 Fleur-de-de 18 Straight things



CRYPTOQUIP

IRFAEK-RY-OKC IRFCGN YQAIZ
OHRTS MRFC IOSM SPOS
OWC AFJAMP OEG JQONYTQ:
"Y W A M Z N H T M A E C M M."
Saturday's Cryptquip: BECAUSE THE OLD BAKER WAS VERY SICK OF HIS CURRENT WAYS, HE DECIDED TO TURN OVER A NEW LEAF.
Today's Cryptquip Clue: I equals C