

Sania in final

India's Sania Mirza fought her way through a gruelling three-set semifinal at the Pattaya Open Saturday, winning 6-4, 5-7, 6-1 for the chance to take on top seed Vera Zvonareva for the trophy.

Mirza sought to show off past glories as she took on up-and-coming talent Magdalena Rybarikova, but the Slovakian fought back hard in a match that took more than two hours and enthralled the crowd in Thailand's southern gulf.

Mirza used her big forehand to take the first set 6-4 and maintained her momentum to hold a 5-3 lead in the second set before Rybarikova upped her tempo and broke back to eventually take the set 7-5.

But the effort Rybarikova had mustered took its toll and she needed attention from her trainer for a back injury in the deciding set.

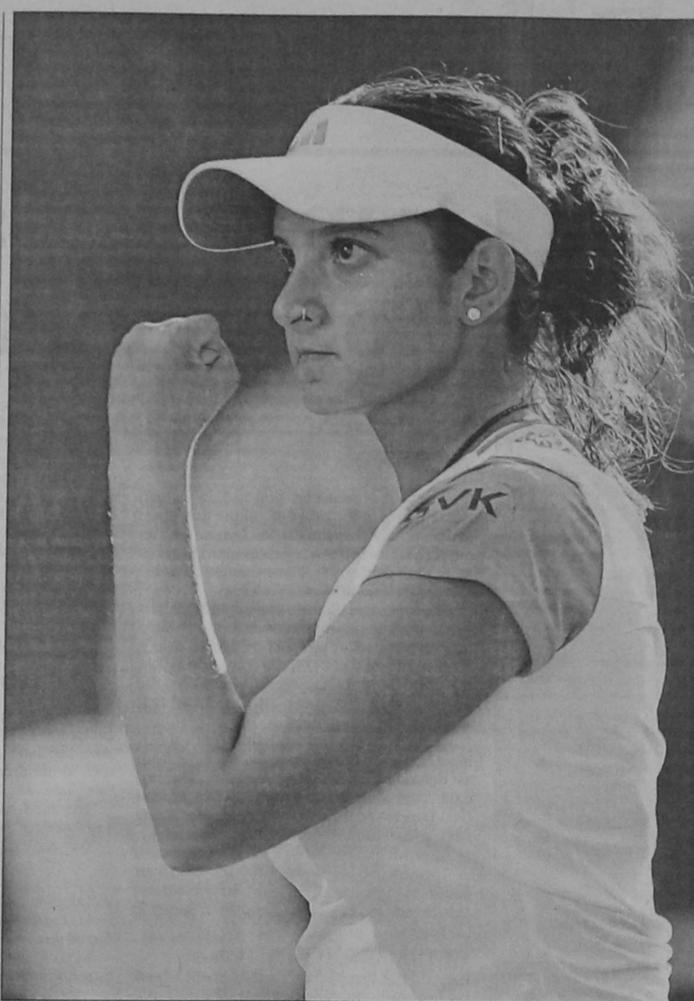
The injury appeared to hamper the Slovakian's movement and she lost the final set 6-1 to secure Mirza her first spot in a tournament final since Stamford in 2007.

Mirza will now be up against Russia's Zvonareva in Sunday's deciding match after the top seed cruised to an easy win against Israel's Shahar Peer.

The resurgent Peer had been expected to give Zvonareva a real test but instead the favourite raced to a 5-0 lead before Peer could get a game on the board and the set was quickly wrapped up 6-1.

Seventh-seed Peer found her rhythm in the second set and the match went with serve until the seventh game when Zvonareva broke Peer's resistance.

Zvonareva, whose serve was never under pressure throughout, finally wrapped up the set 6-4 and the match in just over one hour of play.



India star Sania Mirza celebrates after winning a point during her semifinal match against Slovakia's Magdalena Rybarikova at the Pattaya Open on Saturday. Mirza won 6-4, 5-7, 6-1.

PHOTO: AFP

T20 time in Australia

CRICINFO, Sydney

The four-year anniversary of the inaugural Twenty20 international falls on Tuesday, and the original combatants, Australia and New Zealand, will again face-off at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) on Sunday. The format has certainly come a long way since the New Zealanders took to Eden Park in figure-hugging retro uniforms and handlebar moustaches, providing players with not only an extra avenue in which to represent their country, but also the opportunity to perform before potential Indian suitors.

Australian audiences may have cause to double-take when casting an eye over the squad for Sunday's match at the SCG. With an average age of 26, this is the youngest team Australia have turned out in recent memory, indicating the selectors' desire to inject new blood into the national squad. Michael Clarke (back) and Mitchell Johnson (ankle) have been rested ahead of the Test squad's departure for South Africa on Monday, paving the way for Brad Haddin to captain his country for the first time. The Victoria batsman Rob Quiney has received his maiden call-up.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA (from): Brad Haddin (captain), David Warner, David Hussey, Callum Ferguson, Moises Henriques, Adam Voges, James Hopes, Cameron White, Nathan Bracken, Ben Hilfenhaus, Peter Siddle, Rob Quiney.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Daniel Vettori (captain), Neil Broom, Ian Butler, Grant Elliott, James Franklin, Martin Guptill, Brendon McCullum, Nathan McCullum, Peter McGlashan, Brendon Dlamanti, Iain O'Brien, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor.

BD's hopes

FROM PAGE 17 He target making 96 runs in 20.1 overs for the loss of only one wicket.

After the departure of opener Qanita Jalil (24), another opener Bismah Maroof knocked an unbeaten 41 which included seven boundaries and one down Nain Abidi's 19 not guided Pakistan to triumph. Bangladesh skipper Salma Khatun took the only wicket that fell in the Pakistan innings.

Bismah Maroof of Pakistan was named player of the match.

Bangladesh started the tournament on a dreadful note losing both their matches in Bogra, but a spirited performance against Sri Lanka on Friday warranted their claim for one-day recognition by the ICC. Before the tournament started, captain Salma Khatun promised to put up a fighting act on the field but this loss has exposed her team's weaknesses against big sides.

BRIEF SCORE: BANGLADESH 94 all out in 34.4 overs (Ayesha 21, Salma Khatun 18, extras 23; Naila Nazeez 3-23, Sana Mir 2-12) PAKISTAN 96-1 in 20.1 overs (Bismah Maroof 41 not out, Qanita Jalil 24; Salma Khatun 1-25)

New venue

FROM PAGE 17 adjustment necessary, and formulate new plans in conditions about which little would be known.

From the 11 that was pick for the aborted second Test, England may choose to decommission James Anderson for the moment, particularly if there is a hint that the pitch would favour someone like Steve Harmison, who may be able to extract a bit more pace and bounce. West Indies are unlikely to change their line-up which they chose for the aborted Test.

SQUADS

WEST INDIES (from): Chris Gayle (captain), Lionel Baker, Suleiman Benn, Shivanine Chandepaul, Fidel Edwards, Ryan Hinds, Brendan Nash, Daren Powell, Denesh Ramdin, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Lendl Simmons, Devon Smith, Jerome Taylor.

ENGLAND (from): Andrew Strauss (captain), Alastair Cook, Tim Ambrose, James Anderson, Ian Bell, Stuart Broad, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Steve Harmison, Monty Panesar, Kevin Pietersen, Matt Prior, Adil Rashid, Owais Shah, Ryan Sidebottom, Graeme Swann. Umpires: Daryl Harper and Tony Hill.

An arrow through Richards's heart

Cricket

AFP, St Johns

Players, fans, media personnel, and concessionaires all had reason to bemoan the abandonment of the second Test between West Indies and England on Friday at the Vivian Richards Cricket Ground.

Spare a thought however, for the man whose name adorns the ground.

Sir Viv, the former West Indies captain, watched the eyes unfold right before his face from the air-conditioned comfort of the BBC Test Match Special commentary box.

A fiercely proud man, native of Antigua & Barbuda, and one who personified the excellence and greatness of the game, he was gutted by the shambles.

"This is an arrow right through my heart," he exclaimed on the BBC Radio.

"This is not a shot in the foot for West Indies cricket. This is an arrow right through the heart. This is a huge pill to swallow."

The Test was abandoned after only 10 balls as England reached seven without loss, when match officials felt the sandy outfield particularly in the area of the bowlers' run-ups, were too dangerous to allow the sham to continue.

"I am ashamed to have my name associated with this," Richards said. "The members and officials of the Antigua & Barbuda Cricket Association should hang their heads in shame."

"For these people to tell

everyone that the ground was ready is a huge lie. They have been telling little porky pies. You can make excuses for certain people at times, but with so many experts around there can be no excuse.

He added: "The reputation of Antigua & Barbuda is in these people's hands. There are a lot of guys in the background who should have known better, that this ground wasn't ready. There have been countless

it was -- with little success. Several hours of playing time was lost in a drawn Test against Australia last year, when a squall again invaded and reduced parts of the outfield to a swamp.

Though the sun shone brilliantly and ground-staff employed various measures to dry the surface, the damage was significant.

More promises were made to the West Indies Cricket Board and they assigned the second Test on the assurance of the Antigua authorities that would get it right next time.

"Let me apologise to everyone on behalf of the WICB for what can only be described as an embarrassment," WICB President Julian Hunte said following the fiasco.

"I have been assured that the venue was checked because we have an operations department, and they worked closely with the ACA to get the ground ready.

Late last year, a regional company which had produced quality outfields at three other venues for the World Cup in the Caribbean was hired to relay the surface.

But they discovered a number of anomalies and the project timeline was doubled, plus 10 days were lost to facilitate a concert being staged during the Christmas holidays.

But the WICB should have taken a clue that all was not right a month ago, when the ACA insisted that it would not host a West Indies first-class championship match between Leeward Islands and Guyana at the ground.



SIR VIVIAN RICHARDS

problems with the outfield at the VRCG which was constructed at a cost of over 20 million dollars with assistance from the Chinese Government ahead of the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean.

Local knowledge indicates that it was built in a basin near a well-known water course, and this led to problems of poor drainage when rainfall collected on parts of the outfield.

The Antigua & Barbuda Government promised remedial work would be done -- and

Tait could be a Tanvir

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Daren Berry, the Rajasthan Royals' director of coaching, has said Australian fast bowler Shaun Tait could make an "enormous" impression during the Indian Premier League's (IPL) second edition if he is available for the whole season.

Although Rajasthan, the inaugural champions, will miss the services of Pakistan left-arter Sohail Tanvir, the highest wicket-taker in the 2008 season, Berry believed Tait could be as destructive with his pace as Tanvir was with his swing.

"I'm extremely excited about the fastest bowler in the

world: Shaun Tait. He has been out of the Australian team for a period but both [Shane] Warne and myself are quite close to Tait and believe he could have a significant impact in the IPL. Depending on his selection for the Australian ODI team [against Pakistan], we will have him for at least half of the tournament and his presence will be enormous. He is crucial given Tanvir's absence this year," Berry said at a media conference to announce Rajasthan's three latest overseas signings.

While Rob Quiney, the hard-hitting Victoria top-order batsman, has been picked as an uncapped signing, Victoria medium-pace Shane Harwood and Queensland allrounder Lee

Carseldine have been signed as replacements for the Pakistan pair of Tanvir and Kamran Akmal.

Berry said Rajasthan were aware the expectations will be higher after their "fairytale" triumph in the inaugural season. "Last year after the defeat in the first game against Delhi Daredevils I read headlines that Rajasthan were the circus of the IPL. The story that unfolded after that was like a fairytale," he said. "This is a new group of players, a new season and all other franchises will be looking to beat Rajasthan Royals. Last year we were the underdogs and this year we are the top dogs, but we still confident."

Nadal struggles thru'

Tennis

AFP, Rotterdam

Rafael Nadal had to struggle through another three-set challenge before beating Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4 on Friday to reach the Rotterdam Open semifinals.

The world number one has been taken to three sets in all three rounds this week, but the Spaniard said his game was improving on this fast, indoor surface.

"This was definitely my best match of the week," said Nadal after two hours, 40 minutes in a contest where Tsonga fired six aces.

"Tsonga just came from winning a tournament and was extremely tough. This was a very important win for me. I'm so glad to be in my first semifinal here."

The Australian Open champion had chances in the second set to wrap up a quick victory, but couldn't convert.

A 2-0 lead in the tiebreaker went begging as Johannesburg champion Tsonga reeled off six consecutive points his way to levelling at a set each.

Nadal finally got on top with a break for a 2-0 lead in the third set, but promptly handed it back. A double-fault from Tsonga set up a match point, which Nadal converted.

Nadal will face fifth seed Gael Monfils, who defeated French compatriot Julien Benneteau 7-6 (7/4), 6-1, for a place in the final.

Andy Murray produced a 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 3-0 victory over French opponent Marc Gicquel,

who pulled out with a hamstring injury, and then suggested a plan to try and change the new drug-testing regime.

The Scot continued to quietly rail at the new demands from international anti-doping bodies that top 50 players report their location for one hour per day every day of the year in case drug testers want to pay a surprise visit.

"I read somewhere that some Italian football teams are simply refusing to do it (report)," he said. "Sometimes things have to happen for a change to be made."

"At least 95 per cent (they met in Melbourne before the Australian Open) are against the system. We're not against drug testing, we're against having to report your location every single day."

"If everyone signed something (to protest) maybe something could be changed. I don't see them banning 90 of the top 100 players."

Murray will next meet Croatia's Mario Ancic, who put out 2007 champion Mikhail Youzhny 6-4, 6-2.

Ancic, ranked 28th, has lifted two of his three career titles in the Netherlands and was a Rotterdam semifinalist four years ago against Roger Federer.

After two years of illness and injury, the 24-year-old is finally starting to believe that his run of rotten luck has ended.

"I really believe that it's all behind me now. I'm now up to the hard work and the comeback. I'm full of confidence," added last week's Zagreb finalist against countryman Marin Cilic.

Ancic managed nine aces and saved all seven break points he faced against Youzhny, the Rotterdam winner in 2007.

Arman ton stuns

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but it was Faisal Hossain who enabled Mohammedan to put up the commanding total. The left-hander smashed four boundaries and as many sixes to make a 433-167.

ABAHANI-PEGASUS

Indian all-rounder Venugopal Rao made his debut with Abahani and scored the team highest 37 off 61 balls in his side's otherwise poor batting display but still the holders were bundled out for 175 runs.

Pegasus however failed to cash in on their brilliant bowling effort as country's leading paceman Mashrafe along with his new ball partner Shubashis Roy fired on to warp up Pegasus for 106 runs.

Mashrafe claimed four wickets for 25 runs in 6.2 overs while Roy captured three for 16 runs in 10 overs.

Sri Lankan Ruvin Peiris top scored 37 off 77 balls with the help of four boundaries.

BIMAN-PARTEX

Shakib's purple patch continued as the world's number one all-rounder in ODI followed up his two for 30 with a blazing unbeaten 51 that saw four boundaries and three sixes as Biman posted 159 for three in reply to ParTEX's 153-9.

Veteran opener Javed Omar was the other notable scorer with 47 off 107 balls that featured six fours.

It was however man-of-the-match Mahbulul Alam who gave the foundation for the comfortable victory as the national right-arm paceman, who grabbed five wickets in the previous match against Pegasus, returned with a four-wicket haul to make the damage in the ParTEX innings.

Pakistani Rashed Hanif was

the top scorer for ParTEX with 33 runs.

BRIEF SCORES

MOHAMMEDAN: 242-7 in 50 overs (Nasiruddin 61, Pankaj 82, Faisal 67, extras 18; Aslam 2-23, Salahuddin 2-47, Akil 1-41).

VICTORIA: 244-2 in 43.2 overs (Amin 29, Arman 100 not out, Ashraf 50, Akil 46 not out, extras 19; Shuvo 1-42).

Result: Victoria won by eight wickets.

ABAHANI: 175 all out in 47.2 overs (Tamim 16, Sahagir 23, Venugopal 37, Nasir 16, Rezaul 14, Nadif 13, Mashrafe 24, Kamrul 14, extras 12; Jubair 2-30, Ruvin 2-27, Bashir 3-36).

PEGASUS: 106 all out in 36.2 overs (Rahat 13, Ruvin 37, Rubayet 11, Mobassair 14, extras 15; Mashrafe 4-25, Roy 3-16).

Result: Abahani won by 69 runs.

PARTEX: 153-9 in 50 overs (Mehrab 12, Rashed 33, Rezaul 28, Ariful 14, Omar 14, Azim 11 not out, extras 15; Mahbulul 4-24, Shakib 2-30).

BIMAN: 159-3 in 33.2 overs (Sadat 29, Javed 47, Jahurul 15, Shakib 51 not out, extras 13; Rashed 2-26).

Result: Biman won by seven wickets.

83 triumph

FROM PAGE 17 in the night that day [June 25] after getting permission from my parents," he said.

"That generation of cricketers was instrumental in inspiring youngsters to take up cricket," Tendulkar, who was the chief guest at the ceremony, said.

Tendulkar also fondly remembered the many afternoons he spent at the MIG ground in its infancy and pointed out that his son Arjun was following his footsteps now.

Yousuf won't

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the contract as an 'A' grade player and six million rupees on being declared best player by the ICC in 2007.

"If anyone proves that I took money for not playing in the ICL then I will return the money," said Yousuf, whose 1,788 runs in 2006 set a world record for most runs in a calendar year.

Yousuf said he had not realised he would be banned from international cricket by signing with the ICL.

"I never knew that I will be deprived of playing for my country, which has always been my top priority. All these regulations have come after I signed the contract," he claimed.

Yousuf said he had asked Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari -- the patron of the PCB -- to resolve the matter.

Four semis

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The BFF has also decided about the number of foreign players a team can enroll five foreign from where four can at a time.

To hold the event smoothly BFF is also planning to give responsibility to an event management company.

It was earlier confirmed that the winners will get Tk one crore, the runners-up Tk 25 lakhs and the four semifinals Tk 5 lakhs each.

The remaining teams of the eight-team meet will also get appearance money and the BFF is contemplating to bring in foreign referees for the semifinals and the final to avoid any controversy.

British press slate sand farce

AFP, London

British newspapers heaped criticism on the West Indies cricket authorities on Saturday after a sand-logged pitch caused one of most bizarre days in the history of Test cricket.

The West Indies' second Test with England had to be abandoned after just 10 balls and 14 minutes of play on Friday after the outfield at the newly built Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua was deemed too dangerous.

The match will resume at a different ground on Sunday. Former England captain Mike Atherton said the fiasco was indicative of the West Indies' fall from cricketing grace.

"Embarrassment and the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) have been close companions over the past few years and nothing that happened yesterday... dispelled the notion that cricket is badly served in the Caribbean by the people who run it," he wrote in The Times.

Atherton said the sandy pitch debacle was the latest in a series of embarrassments which also included the loss of sponsors for the one-day and first-class regional tournaments and disputes between key personnel.

In a piece entitled "While we're at it, dig up the fools who run cricket", Daily Mail columnist Martin Samuel also hit the authorities for six, although he took a wider aim, at both the WICB and the International Cricket Council (ICC).

It was, Samuel wrote, "the wrong match in the wrong venue, poorly conceived from beginning to end."

"It was an inescapable thought that it was more than a day's play that had been abandoned here, it was the integrity of a sport and the love of the people who watch it," he wrote.

Khelaghar

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their target in the 39th over losing just four of their wickets. Aslam scored an unbeaten 65 to help Khelaghar cruise past their opponents.

At the Dhaka University Ground, Agrani Bank prevailed over Motijheel T & T by eight runs in a close encounter. The winners batted first and posted 171 runs losing all their wickets with Adnan scoring a fine 64 and Motijheel's Ashique picking up figures of 3-26.

Chasing 172, Motijheel rode on Taibur's 61 but fell eight runs shy of the target in the end. Ashraf picked up three wickets for the bankers.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 17

girls' singles champions respectively in group-3 matches of the Rajshahi International Junior Tennis at the Zafar Imam Tennis Complex.

In the boys' singles match, David Thomson of Great Britain beat Mohit Mayur Jayaprakash of India by 7-5, 6-7 (2-22), 6-1 in the final.

In the girls' singles, Lusika Khmukum of Thailand defeated Demi Schuurs of Holland by 6-2, 6-2 to lift the title.

DIV 3 FOOTBALL

Rainbow KC and Kasatuly SKS earned an identical 1-0 win in the Citycell 3rd Division Football League at the Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mohammad Mostafa Stadium (BSSMMS) at Kamalapur.

In the first match, Rainbow beat Anirban Sangha by a

solitary goal scored by Aminul Islam Pappu.

In the other match, Kasatuly SKS edged past Govt. Printing Press by a lone goal scored by Mohammad Anwar.

WOMEN CHESS

Masuda Begum came first in the preliminary round of the Parachute 30th National Women Chess Championship with 5.5 points in the last round matches at the chess federation hall room.

Sharmin Sulatana Shirin finished runners-up securing also 5.5 points while Nazrana Khan Eva and Farjana Hossain Khan finished third and fourth position with five points each.

WOMEN KHO KHO

The 2nd First Security Islami Bank Limited Women Kho Kho League, organized by Bangladesh Kho Kho Federation, begins today at

the Kho Kho ground with two matches billed for the opening day.

Defending champions Dhaka Mariners Young Club will take on Dayaganj Barnali Sangha at 3pm, while Old Ideals Association face Monwar Smrity Sangsad at 4pm.

A total of eight teams are contesting the league sponsored by First Security Islami Bank Limited.

The participating teams in the league are Dhaka Mariners Young Club, Dayaganj Barnali Sangha, Premier Club, City Women Club, Azad Sporting Club, Old Ideals Association, Dantas Samaj Seba Sangathan and Monwar Smrity Sangsad.

Eminent sports organizer Gazi Golam Dastagir will formally inaugurate the four-day meet at 3pm.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Clues include: 36 Command, 56 Salaman, 11 On, 12 Overly, 37 Tex, 38 Mischievous, 1 Metropo, 20 Joe, 21 Eiden's, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 19 Got the, 52 Roll call, 7 Robbery, 29 Mimic, 9 Cover, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 19 Got the, 52 Roll call, 7 Robbery, 29 Mimic, 9 Cover, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 19 Got the, 52 Roll call, 7 Robbery, 29 Mimic, 9 Cover, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 19 Got the, 52 Roll call, 7 Robbery, 29 Mimic, 9 Cover, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 19 Got the, 52 Roll call, 7 Robbery, 29 Mimic, 9 Cover, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 19 Got the, 52 Roll call, 7 Robbery, 29 Mimic, 9 Cover, 39 Jab, 40 Garfield, 2 Loton, 22 Dame, 12 Pelvic, 44 Speedy, 3 Cartoonist, 24 "The Crucible", 48 Samovar, 48-Down is, 25 Go, 15 Tumpike, 49 Warp, 5 Simple, 16 Whina, 50 "Saturday", 26 Hall or, 17 Mail de - Night, 6 Mr., 27 Gridron, 18 Bigfoot's, 51 Floral, 6 Mr.,