

Stars struggle thru'

Tennis

AFP, Miami

On a difficult Monday for stars, top seeds Rafael Nadal and Serena Williams, Britain's Andy Murray and Wimbledon champion Venus Williams advanced at the ATP and WTA hardcourt tournament here.

World number one Nadal, the Australian Open champion, was unhappy with his performance but reached the fourth round by defeating Portugal's Frederico Gil 7-5, 6-3. Nadal will next face Swiss 16th seed Stanislas Wawrinka.

"No opponent is easy, especially if you're not playing your best tennis. That's what was happening," Nadal said. "I didn't play very well. I had chances to lose the first set. I didn't feel very well on court."

"I always want to win. My motivation is full in every match. But you can't play well every day and today was one of those days."

Women's number one Serena Williams, the reigning US and Australian Open champion, was often unfocused but outlasted China's 17th-seeded Zheng Jie 7-5, 5-7, 6-3.

"I don't think I played great," Williams said. "She played probably her best tennis yet. I started out great and then maybe lost my focus. Next thing I know, I was 5-all in the first set, which should have never been."

"Just happy to get through it because at one point I hit a ball in the bottom of the net and thought, 'Wow, I haven't done this since I was a junior.'"

Williams, who needs to reach the final to keep her top ranking, won the last three games to keep her quest alive.

"I just felt like if I didn't straighten up I was going to lose," Williams said. "At that point, I was ready to get the match over. I didn't want to lose and I knew I had to do what I needed to do to at least play a little better."

As far as the top ranking goes, Serena feels like she has staked her claim as the world's best by winning the past two Slams and losing to her sister in the finals last year at Wimbledon.

"It seems like I'll be remembered more for how many Grand Slams I'll win," she said. "But number one is also equally as important. If I make it, I make it. If not, oh well."

"Whether I end up number one at the end of this week or not, I think people obviously see me as number one. The respect is there. I've been working hard for several years now and being super consistent and I think it's paying off."

US fifth seed Venus Williams ousted Polish 10th seed Agnieszka Radwanska 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 to reach the final eight, but like her sister was not happy with her performance.

"Every now and then everybody has those kinds of matches," Williams said. "I was hitting really well in the practice. Came out and things weren't going to the way I imagined they would, but that's tennis."

"I just had a lot of errors. Errors, errors. It seemed like when I had the winner it became an error. On days like that, you just kind of have to let the errors go behind you and continue to play aggressively and not pull back."

One more win by Venus and Serena will book an all-Williams semifinal. Venus will face Czech Iveta Benesova while Serena must face her third Chinese foe in a row after Li Na ousted

Russia's Ekaterina Makarova 6-7 (3/7), 6-2, 6-2.

Fourth-ranked Murray advanced to the last 16 by defeating Chile's Nicolas Massu 6-4, 6-4. Next for the Scotsman will be 41st-ranked Serbian Viktor Troicki.

"The end and the start weren't particularly good, but the middle part was very good," Murray said. "I'm obviously happy I managed to close the match out in two sets. I lost my concentration towards the end. I just have to make sure that slip in concentration doesn't happen again."

Australian Samantha Stosur, ranked 42nd, continued her strong run into the quarterfinals by ousting French 20th seed Amelie Mauresmo 6-4, 6-4.

Stosur, who eliminated Russian world number two Dinara Safina in the third round, will next meet 11th seed Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, who defeated Hungarian 25th seed Agnes Szavay 6-2, 6-4.

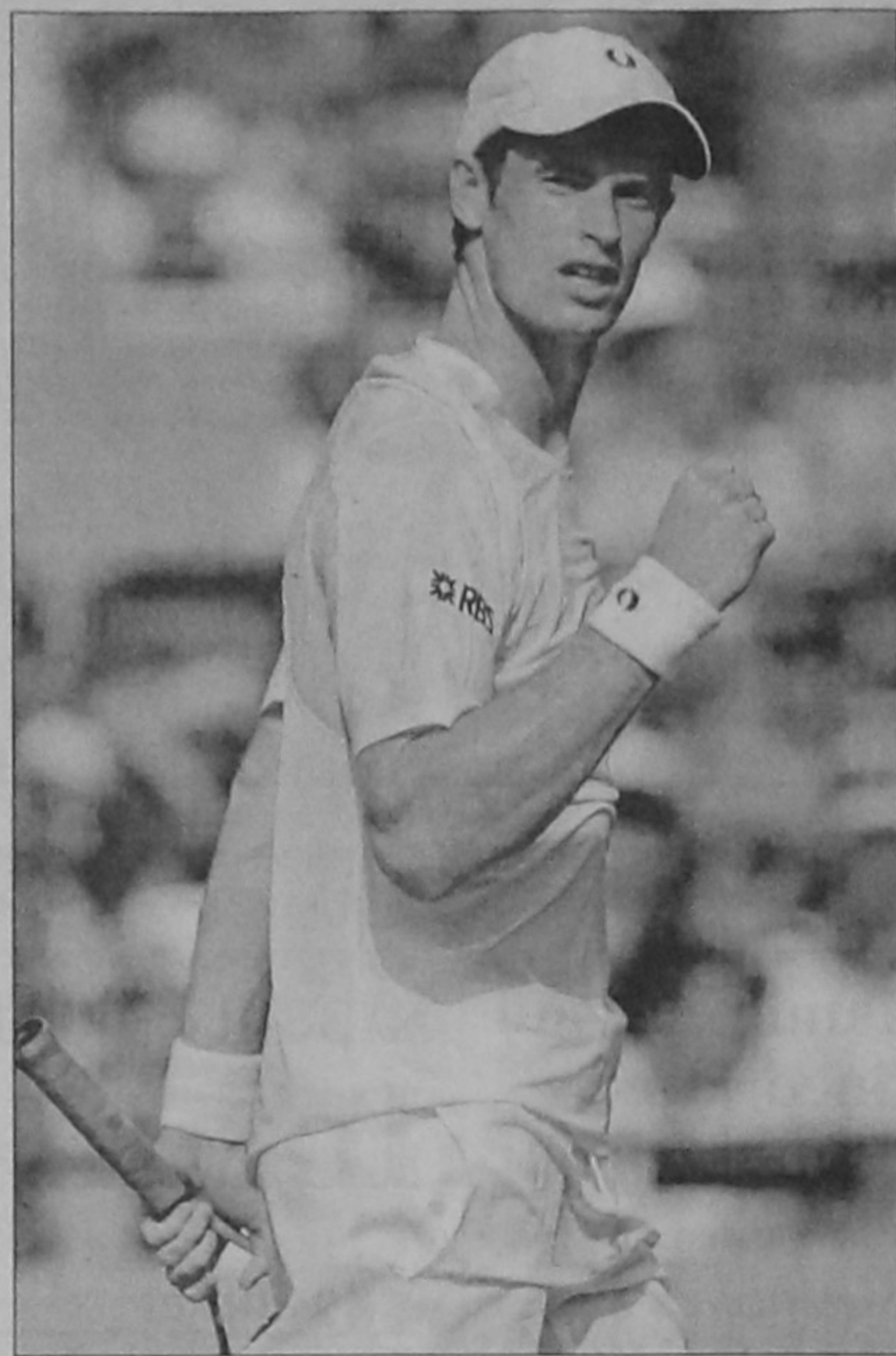


PHOTO: AFP

Andy Murray of Great Britain pumps his fist after defeating Nicolas Massu of Chile during the Sony Ericsson Open at the Crandon Park Tennis Centre in Florida on Monday. Murray won 6-4, 6-4.

Navy-Europa final tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy will take on Europa Youth in tomorrow's final of the Independence Day basketball tournament.

The final will start at the Dhanmondi Basketball Gymnasium at 2.30 pm.

In the semifinals, Navy outplayed Flame Boys 89-53 after establishing their authority with a 46-26 lead at halftime.

Mithun and Rashed were on top form for the sailors with scores of 39 and 30 while Rod and Junaid caged 20 and 11 points respectively for the losers.

Europa, on the other hand, faced a tough first-half contest from Dhumketu on way to a 71-50 victory. The winners led the first half 31-24. Shetu (22 points) and Shoeb (20) were the peak of Europa attacks while Tareq shot 16 and Amit 12 for Dhumketu.

Kiwis include Southee for third Test

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand have added young pace bowler Tim Southee to their squad for the third Test against India starting here on Friday.

"Tim's inclusion gives us additional options with the new ball, and strengthens the attack against this strong Indian batting lineup," selection panel head Glenn Turner said Tuesday.

With the exception of the first innings of the drawn second Test, New Zealand's attack has struggled to contain the star-studded Indian batting lineup.

India hold a 1-0 lead going into the final Test of the series.

Southee, who was dropped after being hammered for figures of 0-105 from 10 overs in the third one-day against India, has since shown good form in domestic cricket.

SQUAD

Daniel Vettori (captain), Daniel Flynn, James Franklin, Martin Guptill, Brendon McCullum, Tim McIntosh, Chris Martin, Kyle Mills, Iain O'Brien, Jeetan Patel, Jesse Ryder, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor.

DAVIS CUP

Bangladesh in Group B

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh have been drawn in Group B of the Davis Cup Asia-Oceania Zone Group IV qualifiers along side Myanmar, Jordan, Turkmenistan and Qatar.

The draw was held yesterday with Group A featuring Vietnam, UAE, Bahrain, Iraq and Yemen.

Both the group winners will qualify for the 2010 Davis Cup Group III.

The competition will start today at the Ramna National Tennis Complex with the singles matches scheduled for the morning and the doubles for the afternoon.

After the draw, State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar officially declared the 10-team meet open.

Gramophone's chief communications officer Rubaba Dowla, Bangladesh tennis federation president AMM Nasir Uddin, general secretary Sanaul Haque and other were also present.

The Bangladesh team: Amol Roy, Shibu Lal, Omar Faruk Sunny, Ranjan Ram, Sheikh Moynuddin Waliullah Jhelun (non-playing captain) and Ghialed Salahuddin (manager).

Giants face

FROM PAGE 17

could shrink to a single point. Chile are meanwhile in the ascendancy following their weekend win in Peru and should they see off Uruguay they will take a big step towards South Africa while also keeping the Uruguayans firmly in their place below Brazil and out of the top four.

Tuesday's game sees Colombia travel to Puerto Ordaz to face minnows Venezuela.

ICL may let

FROM PAGE 17

Twenty20 league and return to international cricket. The Pakistan board has also indicated it would welcome their ICL players back to the national fold if they cut all ties with the unauthorised league.

Players associated with the two-year-old ICL have been barred from all official cricket in most countries, especially in India where the BCCI has adopted a hard-line stance against the private venture.

Vital clash for Scotland

APP, Glasgow



Scotland players have no time to feel sorry for themselves after their weekend humbling from Holland as they prepare to face Iceland in a vital World Cup qualifier at Hampden on Wednesday.

The Scots were outclassed by the Dutch in the Amsterdam Arena on Saturday as the Group Nine leaders chalked up a 3-0 win against George Burley's side.

The win put the Oranje eight points clear of their rivals in the race for automatic qualification leaving Scotland to battle it out for a potential play-off berth with Iceland, Norway and Macedonia.

Scotland's defeat moved Iceland into second spot on goal difference and assistant manager Terry Butcher knows Scotland now need a victory at Hampden if they are to keep their World Cup hopes alive.

"It was always a game we wanted to get three points from and it doesn't matter how we get them, as long as we get those three points," he explained. "We don't have to play fantastic football, as long as we score one more goal than Iceland, then everyone can breathe a sigh of relief."

"All the other teams in our group have two games in June, so we have to win."

Scotland and Iceland are locked on four points from four

matches while Macedonia and Norway trail behind, having played a gameless.

And the former England defender believes it is vital for Scotland to improve their defending at set-pieces, after being caught out by the Dutch during their defeat in Amsterdam.

"It was particularly disappointing to concede that second goal," he said. "We know what we have to do. Set-pieces could be a big factor on Wednesday, and we are working on that."

"We have to have that awareness - and we will need that at Hampden." Scotland have been handed a huge boost with the news vice-captain Stephen McManus should be fit to face Iceland after missing the defeat in Holland with an ankle injury.

Spurs defender Alan Hutton is also in line for a starting place with 37-year-old Graham Alexander and Wolves player Christophe Berra likely to make way.

Goals from Kirk Broadfoot and James McFadden claimed Scotland's only win in the qualifying campaign so far, and Burley's only win since he took charge of the national team, in September last year.

Both players will miss the match at Hampden due to injury but one player expected to play is Eidur Gudjohnsen. The Barcelona star converted a late penalty for Iceland in their defeat against the Scots to ensure a tense finish and will be the visitors' main threat again.

Torun get by Biman

FROM PAGE 17

with Niaz, taking the score past 100 before becoming Sabbir's first victim in the 32nd over. The experienced international, then demeaned himself in an already coloured season by getting embroiled in a feud with a BKSP student.

Skipper Sanwar Hossain tried his level best to provide some impetus but the too fell for 16. With Biman already tottering, Sabbir struck the deadly blows in his seventh over.

Niaz was the first to fall, misjudging the flight of a ball he charged down to and being stumped by Khaled Mashud. Mahbubul Alam was then totally foxed by a turning ball that pierced his defences. And Sabbir notched up the league's second hat-trick after Mohammedan pacer Sajidul Islam when Biman wicketkeeper Sajad Kadir was adjudged leg before off his very next ball.

Torun made a dicey start to their innings as opener Saeed Anwar perished on 14 to countryman Zahid Niaz.

But national players Zunaed Siddique and Hannan Sarker made light of the early loss and took the score to 77 before two quick wickets fell to Sadat.

Rajin Saleh who is often dubbed as the man for crisis made a solid 39 along with Amisur Rahman (38) to take the total past 150 in time for Torun's score to be deemed a winning score should the D/L method come into play.

Rajin finally lost his wicket to Sanwar in the 39th over with the score but when the game was stopped due to bad light on 42.3 overs, the Dhanmondi outfit had amassed 174-6, giving them the match by 11 runs as Biman were only 163 at that stage.

With this win, Torun solidified their runner-up standing with 20 points while Biman remain third on 18.

Kyrgyzstan

FROM PAGE 17

In Monday's match, Mirlan Murzaev gave Kyrgyzstan the lead with a 20th minute penalty. Said Alsbakhi equalised for Palestine nine minutes later.

In earlier matches, hosts Nepal drew 0-0 with Palestine before holding Kyrgyzstan 1-1.

With the withdrawal of Afghanistan, Group C is the only qualifying group with three teams.

The other three pools contain four teams with the top team from each group qualifying for next year's finals, along with the best second-placed team.

Defending champions India, runners-up Tajikistan and third-placed DPR Korea earn automatic qualification based on their performances at the 2008 competition.

Group A, featuring Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh and a winners of a playoff between Macau and Mongolia, kicks off on April 26 in Dhaka.

Turkmenistan are favourites in Group B, which starts on April 14 and also contains Philippines, Bhutan and Maldives.

Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Chinese Taipei and Brunei contest Group D, due to kick off on April 4.

52 enter

FROM PAGE 17

are noted teams among the entrants.

Chittagong Mohammedan, losing semifinalists of the recently concluded Super Cup, are the only professional league team but B. League players are not permitted to play in the competition.

The BFF twice revised the deadline for entries and tournament committee chairman Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir told there was little chance to take new entries.

"We will soon have a meeting to decide the zonal competitions and start of the tournament. We are expecting to launch it in the last week of April," said Jahangir, also a vice-president of BFF.

A total of 13 districts have also wished to host the qualifying rounds.



Did U Know?

Americans Nancy Hogshead and Carrie Steinsieffer registered the first official tie in Olympic history in the 100-metre freestyle at the 1984 Olympics. They each recorded a time of 55.92.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Four players are currently sharing the lead in the points table with six points after the seventh round of games ended in the preliminary phase of the Mercantile Bank 35th National Chess Championship at the chess federation hall room yesterday.

They are Fide Master Abu Sufian Shakil, FM Mehdi Hasan Parag of Biman, FM Taibur Rahman and Debaraj Chatterjee of Destiny 2000.

In the seventh round Shakil drew with Amin, Parag drew with Taibur, Debaraj beat Emon, Robin beat Shafiq, Nasir beat Jewel, Moshtafa beat FM Younus Hasan, Monir beat Sarwar Hossain, Jamal beat FM Md. Javed, Ali beat Akil Hossain, Reza beat Sk. Md. Khairul, Elia beat Mainuddin, Hasan beat Shah Jalal, Polash beat

Mujibur Rahman and Masum beat IWM Rani Hamid.

The eighth round of games will start today from 3.30pm at the same venue.

DIV-II HOCKEY

Tejgaon Agragami and Shantinagar SC won their respective matches in the Green Delta Metropolitan 2nd Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium.

In the day's match, Tejgaon drubbed BPWD 7-0 where Shaheen scored four goals while Mohammad Rajon, Asif Sarker and Sabbir Hossain netted one each for the winners.

In another match, Shantinagar beat Dhaka Hockey Club 5-0 at the same venue. Monir Hossain and Mehdi Hasan scored two goals each while Toufiqul Islam netted the other goal for Shantinagar who led the first half 1-0.

PCB assesses UAE safety



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan has sent a two-man team to the United Arab Emirates to assess security arrangements for next month's series against Australia amid heightened safety demands, an official said Tuesday.

A brazen attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team bus in Lahore on March 3, in which seven players and their assistant coach were wounded, has raised security fears for global sporting events.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief operating officer Salim Altaf vowed to guarantee the best security for the Australian team.

"Since the March 3 attacks, there is a heightened security need for all sports in the world and hopefully we will finalise the best security in cooperation with the UAE government," Altaf told AFP.

Even before the attacks on Sri Lankan team, Pakistan had been a danger zone for foreign teams. Australia, which postponed a tour of Pakistan in March last year, forced their hosts to shift the series to the UAE.

Last month, the International Cricket Council (ICC) shifted the eight-team Champions Trophy from Pakistan to South Africa after several teams refused to play in the

country, where Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants are hunkered down.

"The ICC is taking extraordinary measures to make the game safe and have devised an extensive security plan which must be implemented during all cricket events," said Altaf, a former Pakistan fast bowler.

Pakistan face Australia in five one-day matches. They play the first two in Dubai, on April 22 and 24, before playing the next three games in Abu Dhabi, on April 27, May 1 and 3. They play the Twenty20 in Dubai on May 7.

Altaf said the two-man team will attend a presentation by the Dubai and Abu Dhabi police to finalise security arrangements.

"Police officials in Dubai and Abu Dhabi will give a presentation to our team and hopefully we finalise things in the next couple of days," he said.

Altaf refused to comment on Pakistani media reports that Australia had demanded accommodation in hotels close to the stadiums to minimise travelling time.

"We are in regular touch with the Australian officials and the arrangements will be the best," said Altaf.

Australia last visited Pakistan in 1998.

Australia forced Pakistan to play on neutral venues in Sri Lanka and Sharjah in 2002, a year after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States and the subsequent US-led invasion of Afghanistan, where Australian troops operated.

Abahani start

FROM PAGE 17

Rahim and Rezaul Haque. Both players were adjudged caught behind but the decisions did not convince anybody except umpires Murshed Ali Khan and Nadir Shah.

Left-arm spinner Sunny claimed four wickets for 20 for Abahani. And his captain praised his effort after the match.

"I think it's a team effort but still I would like to give special credit to Nasir (Hossain), Sunny (Arafat) and Nadif (Chowdhury) who really showed their characters when our medium pacers were missing due to injuries in the last few games. But I must say we won all but one game because of team spirit," said Mashrafe.

Asked about the secret of his success, the brave-heart cricketer, who took 28 wickets and scored heavily batting down the order, said: "I always give my hundred percent on a cricket field even if it is a tape-tennis competition."

BRIEF SCORES

ABAHANI: 238-6 in 41 overs (Tamim 23, Imran 18, Parida 89 not out, Sunny 27, Mashrafe 62, extras 10; Azim 4-36, Faruk 1-54, Tariq 1-21)

PARTEX: 162 all out in 33.2 overs (Mehrab 17, Fahad 63, Ariful 36, Mushfiqur 10, extras 6; Shahadat 1-27, Mashrafe 2-43, Talha 2-27, Manosh 1-11, Sunny 4-20).

Result: Abahani won by 76 runs.

Big two fit for England

CRICINFO, undated

Kevin Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff will join the England squad in St Lucia for the series-deciding final ODI against West Indies after being passed fit following scans on their injuries in Barbados.

Both players were nursing injuries during the fourth ODI at the Kensington Oval. Pietersen was forced to leave the field after bowling five deliveries because of a back spasm while Flintoff required heavy strapping on his left thumb after spilling a catch.

Their injuries were scanned and the tests were then sent to London for further examination but revealed no significant damage.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

A crossword puzzle grid with clues for across and down words. The clues include: 1 Across: gets on the golf course; 4 Across: High hit; 7 Across: X-ray; 11 Across: San; 13 Across: Bovine; 14 Across: Subsequently; 15 Across: Approximately; 16 Across: Can metal; 17 Across: Flying toy; 18 Across: Prepare to drive; 20 Across: Medicinal measurement; 22 Across: Ply oars; 24 Across: Online biz; 28 Across: Talk and talk; 32 Across: Push hard; 33 Across: Wooden strip; 34 Across: Pooch; 36 Across: Divisible by two; 37 Across: Unfriendly; 61 Across: Wapiti; 62 Across: Down; 63 Across: Tortoise's opponent; 64 Across: Otherwise; 65 Across: Humor; 66 Across: Alkali; 67 Across: Neutralizer; 68 Across: Church council; 69 Across: Stomach answer; 70 Across: Kimono; 71 Across: Sash; 72 Across: Last; 73 Across: The Catcher in the Rye; 74 Across: Change in the summer; 75 Across: Explosive letters; 76 Across: Solution time: 24 mins.; 19 Across: Caudron; 21 Across: 'Mayday'; 23 Across: Inlet; 25 Across: Exceeding; 27 Across: Clothing store; 28 Across: Department; 29 Across: Head; 30 Across: On; 31 Across: Scepter; 35 Across: Wrigley product; 38 Across: Winter ailment; 40 Across: Monk's address; 42 Across: Luxury craft; 45 Across: It may be a proper subject; 47 Across: Quaker's pronoun; 48 Across: My name is; 49 Across: Put in jeopardy; 50 Across: Ms. Sills; 51 Across: Peron or Gabor; 52 Across: Melody; 54 Across: Obtain.

A cryptogram puzzle with a grid and a key. The key includes: T Q N H D S A P S X J Q A E D L X J J Z D; Z O W Q H F M L G W L D W T J L E F J; K J Z J W L J N O Q H M E J D D G J; G W D W P F J L K W S X T H F N. The puzzle text is: Saturday's Cryptogram: AFTER NOVELIST MAILER BECAME THE EMPLOYEES' SUPERVISOR, THEY BEGAN CALLING HIM FOREMAN NORMAN. Today's Cryptogram Clue: Q equals Y.