

Ferrero wins Casablanca crown

AFP, Casablanca

Spain's former world number one Juan Carlos Ferrero won his first title in more than five years on Sunday in taking the 450,000 euros Casablanca clay court event with a 6-4, 7-5 win over French fifth seed Florent Serra.

Ferrero, unseeded, came through from a field which was devoid of top 20 players and where Russian Igor Andreev was the top seed.

The Spanish veteran, who turned 29 in February and won the French Open in 2003 for his only Grand Slam, took his career haul to 12 singles titles and 397 match wins.

A catalogue of injury problems and consequent loss of form have seen his ranking tumble to 115, depriving him of a chance to have a crack at a third title in Monte Carlo this week.

Sharapova out of 50

AFP, Paris

Maria Sharapova slid out of the top 50 in the new WTA rankings published Monday which saw Serena Williams still top of the heap though she is set to surrender her status to Dinara Safina next week.

Sharapova, who is currently injured, dropped 23 places and now stands 53rd on the computer.

The 21-year-old underwent shoulder surgery in October and only recently returned to training, missing a swathe of major tournaments, including the Olympics, and the US and Australian Opens.

Serena, a first-round loser last week at Marbella, is now skipping Charleston after the reigning US and Australian Open champion hurt her leg during the prestigious hardcourt tournament in Miami, an injury which dogged her in the claycourt tournament in Spain.

APL in October!

INTERNET, undated

Twenty20 cricket fever has now also hit the US, with an inaugural American Premier League (APL) series set to take place in New York in October this year, the Afrikaans weekly Rapport said here on Sunday.

Rapport disclosed that former Proteas Nicky Boje, Andrew Hall and Lance Klusener had already been offered lucrative contracts to participate in the APL, which would be modelled on the success of the Indian Premier League (IPL) that will be played out in South Africa from the next week.

The three South Africans were banned from participating in South African teams after they became the first local players to sign up for the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL) two years ago.

Modi gets

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Modi's Mumbai residence, the reports said.

"I do not want to discuss anything on this issue," Modi was quoted by Mid-Day as saying from South Africa.

Nicholls & Steyn have been entrusted with managing the IPL's security in South Africa, and Nicholls had said last week that the lack of time, the crime rate in South African cities and the elections in the country on April 22 were some of their main challenges.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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has arranged a daylong kabaddi festival to mark the Bengali New Year at the Dhaka Kabaddi Stadium today.

In the morning, current players and federation officials will play an exhibition match and in the afternoon the national women's kabaddi team will split into two teams and play another showcase game.

HANDBALL COACH LEAVES FOR HUNGARY National handball coach M Kamrul Islam leaves the capital today to attend the International Coaching Course on Handball in Budapest, the capital of Hungary.

Kamrul is the lone Bangladesh coach to take part in the course under the Olympic Solidarity Scholarship. The course will continue up to June 1.



Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero displays the winner's trophy with Moroccan Sports Minister Nawal El Moutawakil (L) after beating Florent Serra of France in the final of the ATP Tennis Tournament in Casablanca on Sunday.

Shane's Kamran warning

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Shane Warne, the Rajasthan Royals captain, has named Kamran Khan, an 18-year-old rookie left-arm fast bowler, as one of the players to watch out for in the Indian Premier League (IPL) starting in Cape Town on Saturday. Warne has also provided fresh insights into his relationship with Graeme Smith, a bitter rival once but an IPL teammate now, and reiterated his controversial theory that an international team doesn't need a coach.

Warne, whose captaincy was a revelation during last year's IPL when he galvanised a bunch of not-so-famous players into a winning combination, insisted that he did not regret missing out on being Australia captain.

He shared his shortlist of Rajasthan's potential stars of this IPL with the South Africa-based Sunday Times newspaper and included Kamran, who bowled just one over against Cape Cobras in a warm-up on Saturday, alongside India players Ravindra Jadeja and Yusuf Pathan. Indian media reported that Kamran, who bowled Cobras' Justin Ontong with an off-stump yorker in that over, is the son of a wood-cutter who gained his shoulder strength from cutting wood in Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh in north India. He is yet to play first-class cricket and was reportedly signed by Rajasthan Royals for 12 lakh rupees (24,000 dollars) a year after Darren Berry, the assistant coach, spotted him at a local tournament in Mumbai.

The team, which had nicknames for each player to pin down his role in the side, is reportedly on the verge of finalising one for Kamran. "We've got one young player who's going to be very interesting," Warne said. "We're tossing up now what his nickname is going to be -- Wild Thing or Tornado, something like that. Kamran Khan is a young kid, a left-arter, a slinger, he doesn't speak much English at the moment. He's a tiny little guy but he bowls 140 plus. Another guy to look out for is Ravindra Jadeja. He played last year, did enough but he's had another year of experience. Then there's Yusuf Pathan. He was dynamite last year, he just destroys medium-pace and spin bowling. He and Andrew Symonds are two of the cleanest hitters I've ever seen."

Smith was also important to his plans for a lot of reasons, Warne said. "One is that he's

another captain to bounce ideas off," he said. "When I'm bowling, he's someone to keep an eye on the field. When I'm talking to a bowler he's making sure the best fielders are in the right spots. I think he enjoys the IPL as well, just having the opportunity and the freedom to go out and bat without the responsibility of anything else. For us, being in South Africa and having the captain of South Africa in our side is a huge advantage."

He said he had become "good buddies" with Smith after spending some time together during the inaugural IPL, and added that the latter had matured as a captain, too. "We had a few beers after the first game and chatted about a lot of stuff," he said. "We hung out a fair bit. We've kept in touch since then and become good buddies. They [South Africa] have done well. He's matured a bit too. He came in at a young age and wanted to try and mix it. He didn't want to take a backward step. He was so verbal and public about everything. We won 5-0 [in 2005/06] and I said to him the other day, when something's not working, try to do something else. Don't just continue and let the ego get in the way. He said, 'yeah, yeah, I've learned my lesson'. He learned a lot about himself and how things work. He's matured into a good captain."

Warne also insisted his views on international coaching had not changed even years after his controversial rift with John Buchanan, the former Australia coach.

"The only reason I'm coach is because the Royals don't really have a coach," he said. "I'm just the captain, really. I've got two assistants who do a good job in Darren Berry and Jeremy Snape. Darren looks after practice while I get around and speak to individuals and Snapey floats around, helps guys prepare and does some one-on-one stuff. Captains should always run the cricket. At international level I don't think you need a coach. At domestic level you need a coach."

He said he had no regrets about not being Australia captain but added he enjoyed captaincy. "I'd be sitting in a straitjacket in a padded cell if I started regretting everything that happened in my life," he said. "I never chased the captaincy. If I'd had the opportunity it would have been great but I don't look back and think about it. I've captained the Royals, Hampshire, Victoria and Australia in one-day matches. People can see the way I captain. I enjoy being captain and it brings out the best in me."

A man on a mission

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quarrelling. But I understand that once I provide a little fund, things will get better. I've got the assurance of National Sports Council (NSC) chairman General Moeen U Ahmed who will allocate the grounds to me for a certain period of time. That is good enough for me.

DS: What about the academy you are trying to set up?

KS: I had a long discussion with the NSC chief about Sylhet BKSP, which has been built but is lying idle. He assured me that he would give me the place for five years with an extension of another five years. So I have already written to him and I believe the moment he has the time to go through it, I will get it. I will go immediately into the academy once I get it. People think the academy is far away but not me. If get that complex, I would be there by September.

DS: How much money would

you need?

KS: Not less than 10 to 15 crore. We don't have any sponsors now but I hope we will get it. It's not a question of confidence, its question of hard work and with the help of God, things are happening. If I put my honest and hard work, may be somebody will realise this is a product we are building, they may come in, plus I am also talking to some foreign people and we may have an understanding. Like if this academy produces top class players, we'd share the product...some kind of arrangement because funding is one of the biggest factors.

DS: What's at the end of your dream?

KS: I think by the end of my term, I should be able to reach a point when I'll have to increase ticket price for a match. That's not far. People should understand that we

would not do it for money. The product would be very expensive but I can't afford more than 40,000 people in the stadium and I don't want thousands to go home without getting a ticket. I will increase the price for fewer sales, so less people return from the ground. I believe we should be able to achieve that in three years. And by 2015, the national team should be a force to reckon with. When our team would be participating in a tournament, they would not be taken lightly. That is my ultimate dream.

Finally I want to say that I am grateful for the sponsors are coming. But my personal thanks to Citycell for joining hands when nobody would touch me. I appreciate that and I am very happy and glad with them. My sincere and best wishes to them.

Vaughan gets Ashes blow

AFP, London

Former England skipper Michael Vaughan suffered a setback in his attempts to force his way back into the Ashes reckoning when he made just 12 playing for the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) against county champions Durham at Lord's on Sunday.

The 34-year-old is determined to claim the number three spot for the coming series against the West Indies and Australia, but with the squad to face the West Indians in the first Test due to be named next weekend, time is running out.

Vaughan's only consolation was that Ian Bell, another number three hopeful, was also out for 12 as the traditional curtain-raiser to the English season ended in a rain-affected draw.

Yorkshireman Vaughan was dismissed by former Headingley colleague Mitchell Claydon -- an Australian now qualified for England by virtue of his British passport -- who believes the former skipper has a role to play in the Ashes.

"He is a class player, I saw that when I was playing for Yorkshire, so I am sure they [Australia] would rather see an England side without him," said Claydon.

"He's a big-game player. He proved that the last time the Ashes were here."

Buchanan's clarification

CRICINFO, undated

John Buchanan, the coach of the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders, has said that his four-captain policy for his team had been "misinterpreted". He said that he would not select a squad captain but a leader for each match.

"My four-captain policy has been misinterpreted by most people and I would just like to clarify it," Buchanan a Johannesburg based daily. "Basically I will not select a squad captain but will select a captain for each match."

"That captain will make all the normal decisions such as field placings and bowling changes. However, with a unique, fast-flowing and hectic game like Twenty 20, I feel there should be more decision-makers, more captains in the process to succeed, so one has to think differently."

Buchanan had unveiled his plan last month during a press conference in Kolkata at which the present captain Sourav Ganguly was also present. Ganguly later said that he was not fully convinced about the idea, which also drew flak from other coaches and former players.

Buchanan was excited about the talent in his squad for the 2009 IPL. "I really believe we have a balanced, exciting squad for the IPL," he said. "We will have Chris Gayle for seven games, Brendon McCullum for the whole series, while we also have Brad Hodge, who I believe is one of the best Twenty20 players in the world."

Cricket on Everest!

PTI, Kathmandu

Nepal has allowed two amateur British cricket teams to play a Twenty20 tournament at the base camp of Mt Everest in their attempt to set a world record of playing the game at the highest altitude yesterday.

"The thirty amateur cricketers, who have been barred entry earlier, have now been granted permission to play a T-20 tournament scheduled to begin from April 21. They have already reached Namche Bazar, gateway to the base camp of Mt Everest," Nepal Tourism Board officials told PTI.

The venue of the match Gorak Shep is just 135 meters below the Everest base camp where 30 players and 20 supporting staff will spend 9 days for preparation. The players- aged between 22 and 36-- will try to acclimatise themselves with the weather condition at 5165 meters above sea level, said Ang Tsering Sherpa, president of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

The two teams, named after the first two Everest summiteers Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary, also plan to raise fund of 25,00,00 Pounds for the UK-based 'The Himalayan Trust' which is involved in running schools and hospitals in the Everest region.

Hewitt ends title drought

Tennis

AFP, Houston

Former world number one Lleyton Hewitt ended a two-year title drought on Sunday with a victory over Wayne Odesnik in the final of the US Clay Court Championship.

Australia's Hewitt defeated the American 6-2, 7-5 to claim his 28th ATP title - just his second on clay.

Hewitt hadn't won a title since March 2007, when he triumphed in Las Vegas.

Until a winless 2008, Hewitt had won at least one ATP title for 10 straight years.

"This is what all the hard work is for, to play weeks like this and have this kind of feeling at the end," said Hewitt, who is working his way back from left hip surgery last August. "It makes going through the surgery and all the hard work worth it. It's good stuff."

After taking the opening set, Hewitt quickly went up two breaks in the second, but Odesnik, playing in his first ATP final, won the next five games.

However, Hewitt wouldn't let Odesnik level the match, winning the last four games to secure the victory.

"Clay is a tough surface to close players out," Hewitt said. "I was playing great tennis up to that point, but he's a tough player and he does-

n't give you any cheap points out there. He makes you work for all of them. I felt I was able to put pressure on him up to that stage.

"Even though he got back in that second set every game he won, I had game points. It could easily have been 6-1 in the second set."

Hewitt has now won 499-169 matches on the men's tour, and could notch his 500th match win at this week's Monte Carlo Masters, where he has received a wild card entry.

He has drawn a first-round meeting with another former world number one, Russian Marat Safin.

Roger Federer and Carlos Moya are the only active players with 500 or more match wins.

Rain delayed the start of the match for an hour and a half, and Hewitt said he was going to be hard-pressed to get to Monte Carlo on schedule.

"I might miss the flight now," he said. "It's going to be hard now but this is the why I can here, to win the tournament. Obviously playing Monte Carlo is a bonus but right now my focus has been on winning this tournament. Now I'll start worrying about next week."

Certainly the victory left Hewitt eager to tackle the clay courts of Europe.

"It's a big day to win a claycourt event," he said. "I feel every year I'm getting better on clay. Now I'm looking really forward to the French Open. With a good draw I think I can do some damage there."

'IPL will be close'

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Kings XI Punjab coach Tom Moody expects the Indian Premier League's second season to be more competitive than the first, and says the sides are so evenly matched that it's impossible to choose a favourite.

The Kings XI have begun training in Port Elizabeth ahead of the tournament's lift-off in Cape Town next weekend, and Moody is predicting a great contest in the five-week event.

"There is no way anybody can pick one team above the other. All the sides were evenly matched," Moody said.

"All the teams in the competition are very strong. I think it would be foolish of anyone to try and predict who the favourites or second favourites will be."

Moody's side begin their tournament with a tough opening fixture against the Delhi Daredevils on April 19, and the former Sri Lanka coach expects a good match.

"Delhi Daredevils is always a tough game for us. We've got them first up and they boast a good international list but also have some very good Indian stars."

Moody said the squad have enjoyed getting to grips with conditions in Port Elizabeth.

"It's of great excitement for us to have the opportunity to practice at terrific facilities here in Port Elizabeth," he said. "The ground at St George's is certainly world class, the pitches have been world class and we've enjoyed the experience to date."

"That's particularly so for our Indian players

who need to get used to conditions here in South Africa."

Punjab reached the semifinals in the IPL's inaugural season, and captain Yuvraj Singh expects a similar effort with only the pace bowling stocks a cause for concern.

Brett Lee and James Hopes have been included in Australia's squad to take on Pakistan along with Shaun Marsh, ruling the trio out of IPL action for the first half of the season.

And with Sreesanth still recovering from a back injury and Jerome Taylor recently injured in a car accident, the Kings XI face a difficult opening period.

"We have a good team this season. We have a good batting line-up with the likes of [Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene and Shaun Marsh. Besides, we also have Ravi Bopara this year who can also bowl a bit," said Yuvraj.

"The only worry is the pace department. A couple of pacers are coming back from injuries while Sreesanth has been ruled out. But I am confident that the rest of the squad will rise to the occasion."

South Africa boasts the biggest Indian population outside of India, and Yuvraj is hoping that will create a good buzz with the IPL forced to play in a foreign country.

"The Indian fan base in South Africa is huge and we are expecting them to turn up and support their city teams," the skipper said.

"I am sure that the Punjabi community settled in South Africa will support us. Similarly, those originally from Mumbai would certainly come for Mumbai's matches. Some Indian fans will also fly down to South Africa."

Gibbs gives SA series

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had De Villiers in successive overs, but Duminy and Mark Boucher (29 not out off 25 balls) saw South Africa beyond 300 by putting on 65 in the final seven overs.

Facing such a big target, Australia had no choice but to bat aggressively and it paid off initially, with Haddin showing the attacking prowess of his wicketkeeping predecessor Adam Gilchrist as he collected four sixes and seven fours.

But his assault came to an end when he was caught just inside the rope off Johan Botha and van der Merwe's slow left-arm then did terminal damage to the run chase.

He first bowled Clarke between bat and pad and then spun one past the outside edge of Ferguson's bat, allowing Boucher to make an easy stumping.

Van der Merwe struck again by having Mike Hussey lbw for two and when Hussey's brother David (20) gave Steyn a return catch, the onus was on Ricky Ponting to see his side home.

The Australian skipper did

his best and brought up a half century with four boundaries in five balls off Steyn.

The fast bowler had his revenge, however, when Ponting mis-timed a pull from the final delivery of the same over and Morkel took the catch at mid-wicket to send him on his way for 53.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the fourth one-day international between South Africa and Australia at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth on Monday:

SOUTH AFRICA
Smith c Haddin b Hopes 20
Gibbs c Clarke b Bracken 10
Kallis c Ferguson b Harwood 17
De Villiers c Ferguson b Johnson 8
Morkel b Johnson 4
Boucher not out 29

AUSTRALIA
Haddin c Parnell b Botha 78
Clarke c Van der Merwe 50
Ponting c Morkel b Steyn 53
Ferguson st Boucher b Van der Merwe 3
Morkel 3
Hussey lbw b Van der Merwe 2
D Hussey c & b Steyn 20
Hopes c Gibbs b Parnell 31
Johnson b Morkel 5
Hauritz b Steyn 3
Bracken not out 0
Harwood b Steyn 0
Extras: (lb-4, w-7) 11
Total: (All out in 45.5 overs) 256

Fall of wickets: 1-129, 2-137, 3-145, 4-151, 5-188, 6-226, 7-245, 8-255, 9-256, 10-256.

Bowler O M R W
Steyn 7.5 1 44 4
Parnell 9 0 64 1
Kallis 4 0 25 0
Morkel 5 0 25 1
Botha 10 0 48 1
Van der Merwe 10 0 46 3
Result: South Africa won by 61 runs and lead 5-match series 3-1.

Man-of-the-match: Herschelle Gibbs.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 27 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a 10x10 grid of letters and a key: JQEEU LNE D HWNQF H TYHVR ME KSMVS JNYOL XRLFNU THMEFMDL HEX LVQYTFQIRL: "HIF WIRHO SNFRY."