

Federer finds his feet

Tennis

AFP, Monte Carlo

Roger Federer is taking the good with the bad as he slides into another clay court season at the Monte Carlo Masters.

"It's about getting used to the bad bounces," confessed the 13-time Grand Slam champion. "We've been playing on hard court now for nine months, or eight? You never see a bad bounce."

The Swiss got in an early hit Thursday on the one covered court at the Country Club as forecast rain moved in, delaying the start of play in the third round. Federer was due to play Davis Cup teammate and good friend Stan Wawrinka, the 13th seed whom he's beaten in both of their previous ATP meetings.

But any court time is good time for the world number 2 as he makes the quick transition from the physical perfection of hardcourt to the vagaries of clay.

"All of a sudden you're a little bit worried, sometimes hitting half volleys because you know they can bounce onto your frame. You've just got to look for confidence that you find by playing matches and practise a lot."

"As we don't have much practice yet, you're maybe a bit tentative."

Federer has managed to work player-favourite venue Monte Carlo into a busy schedule, re-defining new wife Mirka Vavrinc's idea of a honeymoon by playing another big event only a few days after their wedding.

The 27-year-old who tied the knot last Saturday in a private ceremony in Basel, said he's had limited exposure to the dirt so far this spring.

"Maybe nine days ago," he said of his first training session. "Maybe 10 hours."

For the last three years, Federer has fallen to Rafael Nadal in the final at the principality, just as he's done at the last three Roland Garros editions.

But finding his feet once again is the key to trying to change that kind of bad luck.

"It's getting used to the sliding, knowing when to slide, how much to slide," he said of the classic technique so far unmastered by American players, none of whom even entered the event.

"And sometimes you slide but you don't have to. This kind of decision-making just happens naturally the more time you spend on the surface."

"It (clay) just feels natural to me because I played so much as a kid. I remember wintertimes I used to play indoor clay, under the

balloon in Basel.

"Clay has always basically been my first surface. The sliding and all this comes to me within the first five minutes, then it's just the timing, how much you have to slide. This stuff just comes with time."

The tournament still boasts a strong field heading towards the wrapup weekend, with the top four seeds all still alive.

Rafael Nadal, his knees untaped for the first time in a year according to his calculation, was taking on Nicolas Pietrangeli, who won a marathon over Marat Safin from 2-5 and match points down in the final set.

Number three Novak Djokovic was to play Spain's Alberto Montanes and British number 4 Andy Murray was facing Fabio Fognini of Italy.



ROGER FEDERER

Windfall for S Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

Moving the Indian Premier League (IPL) extravaganza to South Africa will help create a silver lining to the grey economic clouds hovering above the country.

Economists here speculate that the IPL glitz-and-glamour show, British and Irish Lions rugby tour and FIFA Confederations Cup tournament could provide a 200-million-dollar revenue boost come early July.

"These sporting events will help the country a great deal, especially with growth. Hopefully, they will help relieve some of the current economic pressures," economist Mike Schussler told the Johannesburg Star.

South Africans are feeling the financial pinch, but not so much that they have to abandon watching their favourite sport with tickets for the two IPL double-headers in Cape Town this weekend sold out inside two hours.

And any tourism fall-off suffered by the Mother City at the bottom of the continent will be more than compensated for when the IPL hits town ready to splash the cash.

One and Only, a five-star made-for-celebs hotel opened just two weeks, is a hive of activity and Cape Town will be just the first of many South African cities to benefit from the five-week, 59-match tournament.

FIFA general-secretary Jerome Valcke, who recently complained about the lack of Confederations Cup publicity ahead of the June 14-28 dress rehearsal for the 2010 World Cup, would surely approve of hype IPL-style.

"The heat is on," scream full-page newspaper advertisements bringing revenue to a local industry hard hit by the global financial crisis and every night public and pay television viewers are treated to humorous IPL promotions.

No South African is happier than football official Danny Jordaan at the decision to select South Africa ahead of England as the temporary 'home' of a show likely to woo many converts to the shortest version of the game.

T20, an instant

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Australia captain Ricky Ponting, who is sitting out the 2009 IPL, preferring to concentrate on his team's defence of the Ashes, expressed his concerns over the money on offer in the IPL as well as the rebel Indian Cricket League.

"Unless a balance is achieved, I could see some countries' teams declining in the way Zimbabwe's sides have struggled over the past few years," said Ponting.

"If the IPL keeps growing, the next generation might opt for franchise over country."

The IPL is hoping it has this year's balance right.

Kevin Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff may have been auctioned off for 1.55 million dollars each, but both will only play IPL for two weeks before heading home for a Test series against the West Indies.

IPL ties getting longer

NEIL MANTHORP



Fans who have become accustomed to Twenty20 matches lasting just three hours are in for a surprise during the second season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) -- they will now last three-and-a-half hours. Part of the appeal of the shortest form of the game is the non-stop action but IPL games will now take longer and there will be no action at all during the added time.

The IPL are planning to market the added time as an 'innovation' by calling it a tactical 'time out' but the fact that each innings will now come to a halt for seven-and-a-half minutes after exactly 10 overs makes it neither tactical nor, indeed, practical.

"It is a move that is driven completely and totally by commercial objectives," a senior production official told Cricinfo. "It is designed purely to make even more money by selling airtime. Nobody could argue that this adds any cricketing value to the tournament or that it can be in the viewers' interest, either in the stadium or watching at home," the official said.

The seven-and-a-half minute break will see the stadium crowd entertained by a live band while television audiences will watch three, separate two-and-a-half minute segments, two of which will be sold commercially. The third will show the teams taking drinks and discussing 'tactics' to add some validity to the argu-

ment for the 'time out.'

While one section will be compulsory, mainstream advertising, the other will be set aside for 'special projects'. Queen Rania of Jordan, well known for her agenda of social reform and progression, will lead the way with a series of short films aimed at African children expounding the importance of education.

The IPL can justifiably claim that the project is well intentioned and for a good cause. And at approximately 1 million dollars per episode, it's also very lucrative. There are 118 two-and-half minute slots for sale.

Production teams have also been told that they need to fit 2000 seconds (around 33 minutes) of advertising into every match, a task described by a different member of the production team as "virtually impossible."

"It means taking about 40 seconds of advertising between every over and close to a minute at the fall of every wicket. It's okay in theory but it hardly ever works like that. If a team only loses two or three wickets, or the match finishes in 15 overs, we are in trouble," the same production official said.

In March, the IPL signed a fresh US 1.8-billion-dollar broadcast-rights deal for 10 years with Multi Screen Media (MSM), which operates under the Sony umbrella, and World Sports Group (WSG). The matches are being telecast by Supersport, the South African broadcaster which holds the tournament rights in that country. (The author is a South African broadcaster and journalist and wrote this one for Cricinfo)

Many give it a miss

AFP, New Delhi



The Indian Premier League (IPL) may bring unforeseen riches to the world's top cricketers, but not everyone has fallen for the lure of the lucre.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting and senior pro Michael Hussey opted out of the IPL's second season starting in South Africa on Saturday to rest tired limbs after a back-breaking schedule.

Having played non-stop cricket since September, both players preferred to take a breather before a tour of England which features the World Twenty20 championships in June followed by the Ashes.

The IPL may not have been an attractive proposition for them anyway. Ponting, one of the modern greats, was sold for a surprisingly low 400,000 dollars to the Kolkata Knight Riders at last year's auction.

Hussey, a prolific left-hander, was also picked up cheap by the Chennai Super Kings at 350,000 dollars.

Two other Australians, Michael Clarke and Mitchell Johnson, did not even put themselves up for auction, saying they wanted to concentrate on their international careers.

Expensive players are not guaranteed their entire riches as the England duo of Kevin Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff have found out.

Both went for record sums of 1.55 million dollars each at this year's auction, but England's home series against the West Indies in May has shortened their IPL participation to the first two weeks.

Players are paid on a pro-

rata basis and two other England stars, Paul Collingwood and Owais Shah, will also be similarly affected.

Collingwood and Shah were picked up by the Delhi Daredevils team for identical amounts of 275,000 dollars each.

The International Cricket Council's decision not to set aside a window for what is an essentially Indian domestic tournament is hurting other players also.

West Indian captain Chris Gayle, who commands 800,000 dollars from the Kolkata Knight Riders, and teammate Fidel Edwards, a new signee with the Deccan Chargers for 150,000 dollars, will also be available for two weeks.

Australian paceman Brett Lee and controversial all-rounder Andrew Symonds were set for the entire five-week IPL season since neither was part of the national squad in South Africa.

However, both earned call-ups for Australia's one-day series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates from April 22 to May 7, and left them facing a huge financial setback.

Symonds, bought by the Deccan Chargers for 1.35 million last year, will now be available for only the last two weeks of the IPL.

Lee, a 900,000-dollar signee with Kings XI Punjab, may not even play at all as the Australian medical staff monitors his recovery from ankle and foot injury ahead of the Ashes.

Australian Shane Watson, who was the IPL's player of the tournament last year, is also out till May 7 due to his inclusion in the Pakistan series.

"I think Shane will miss the first nine games and be avail-

able for the last five and hopefully the finals," said Shane Watson, his Rajasthan Royals captain. "He is a big loss."

The biggest losers are the Pakistani cricketers who were thrown out of the IPL this year after Islamabad denied them permission to travel to India for the tournament following growing tensions between the two countries.

The players' appeal to allow them to return to the IPL since the tournament had been shifted to South Africa was rejected by tournament organisers.

It deprives Watson's champion team of the services of left-arm seamer Sohail Tanvir, the highest wicket-taker last year with 22 wickets.

C'Ron stunner

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ball over the crossbar.

The visiting side, maybe spurred on by a traditional Manchester downpour, started the second period brightly with Berbatov testing Helton a minute into the half.

The game settled into a less frantic pattern than the first-half as United drew numbers back and invited their hosts to play in front of them.

With their defence looking much more solid than the first leg, the visitors were restricting Porto to long-range shots, midfielder Raul Meireles coming closest with a 25-yard curler over the crossbar.

Again set-plays threatened United and centre-back Rolando should have equalised from Meireles's corner, but put his header wide of the goal with van der Sar flourishing.

There was time for one last scare for the visitors but Lisandro Lopez hit his six-yard shot straight at van der Sar with the goal gaping.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

A discussion on sporting development was held at the Ansar VDP headquarters yesterday.

Ansar VDP director general Maj Gen Abdul Hafiz headed the symposium that discussed the successes of the forces' athletes and current activities. DG Maj Gen Hafiz tried to find out ways to get rid of weaknesses and develop players' skills.

"Our position in sports is quite satisfactory. But we want further improvement in the upcoming Bangladesh Games and in international meets," said Maj Gen Hafiz.

Deputy director general Brig Gen Muhammad Anisur Rahman was also present during the occasion.

More than three-hundred Ansar athletes from 25 disciplines took part in the discussion.

DIV III CRICKET

Gulshan Youth defeated Tongi Cricket Academy by 49 runs in a low-scoring game of the Super League phase in the Third Division Cricket League at the Dhanmondi Cricket ground yesterday.

Batting first, the Gulshan-based club made only 128 runs from 39.1 overs with Rabiul top-scoring with 21. Tongi failed to mount any challenge as Imran took four wickets to skittle out the suburban side for only 79 runs from 25.3 overs.

Young Pegasus, Tasin Hasin Cricket Academy and Bangladesh Police also won their respective matches.

MEN'S HANDBALL

The "Kha" zone matches of the Exim Bank 19th Men's Handball, organised by Bangladesh Handball Federation, begin today at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore with the participation of twelve districts.

Jessore deputy commissioner Mohibul Haq will be the chief guest on the opening day, while Jessore Police Super Didar Ahmed will be present as a special guest.

Anybody's

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All-rounder Yusuf Pathan also achieved fame after just one tournament to later become a vital part of India's one-day and Twenty20 squad.

Pathan did not let his skipper Warne down with his hard-hitting and tidy off-spin. He was the seventh-highest scorer with 435 runs, including the tournament's fastest 50, off just 21 balls against Deccan Chargers.

Fast bowler Manpreet Gony was another unknown player making a big impact, grabbing 17 wickets for runners-up Chennai Super Kings. He was later rewarded with an India cap for the Asia Cup in Pakistan.

Paceman Dhawal Kulkarni, 20, forced his way into India's Test squad for a recent tour of New Zealand on the strength of his IPL performances. He had come into the tournament without playing a first-class match, but took 11 wickets.

Pakistan's Tanvir was not a crowdpuller like compatriot Shoaib Akhtar or Australian Glenn McGrath, but was second to none when it came to delivering in crunch situations.

He was the tournament's leading wicket-taker with 22 and played a big role in Rajasthan Royals' triumph along with Australian all-rounder Shane Watson.

India reach

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champions to their lowest ranking in the ICC ODI Championship table.

Interestingly, out of a total of 79 months since the launch of the ICC ODI Championship table, Australia has held the top spot for 69 months, including 52 straight months from October 2002 to January 2007.

However, despite trailing 1-3 against South Africa in the on-going five-match series, Ponting's men will regain their second spot from India if they manage to win the final ODI against the Proteas on Friday in Johannesburg.

SL under-19

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scheduled to arrive in Dhaka at 10:40pm this morning. They will return home on May 10.

Meanwhile, the home side have been holding practice matches to assess the players and are close to declaring a final squad.

SQUAD

Dinesh Chandimal (captain), Angelo Perera (vice-captain), Udara Jayasundara, Buwanaka Ekanayake, Kusal Perera, Banuka Rajapaksa, Imesh Udangane, Chathura Silva, Sameera Weerasinghe, Muthusara Perera, Roshan Jaleel, Chathura Peries, Vimanga Perera, Lahiru Jayarathne, Madushan Ekanayake.

Bollywood cricket

AFP, Mumbai



The involvement of some of Bollywood's biggest stars in the Indian Premier League (IPL) means the world's best one-day cricketers are not the only draw when the competition starts this weekend.

Leading figures in India's Hindi-language film industry are closely involved in the eight teams who will battle it out for Twenty20 supremacy in South Africa from Saturday.

Top actor-producer Shahrukh Khan part-owns Kolkata Knight Riders, actress Preity Zinta has a stake in King's XI Punjab and fellow star Shilpa Shetty has taken a share in defending champions Rajasthan Royals.

Action hero Akshay Kumar is brand ambassador for Delhi Daredevils, movie heartthrob Hrithik Roshan is flying the flag for the Mumbai Indians, while screen siren Katrina Kaif is supporting the Bangalore Royal Challengers.

Top performers and music directors have also got in on the act, producing music videos for many of the teams that owe much to Bollywood's song and dance routine tradition.

In their oversized film star sunglasses and designer clothes, Shetty, Zinta and Kaif added much-needed glamour to the gathering of corporate suits at the auction for new players in the resort state of Goa earlier this year.

For the actors, many of whom who have been making the rounds at promotional events before the start of IPL's second season, merging cricket and film makes perfect sense given the fanatical following that both have on the subcontinent.

"Cricket is not a sport in our country, it's a religion," said Shetty in February after she and her partner, British Asian businessman Raj Kundra, bought a 16-million-dollar stake in the Rajasthan Royals.

"I am very passionate about cricket and who

better to invest in than the current reigning IPL champions. It completes the success story for the IPL team by merging with Bollywood."

Shahrukh Khan, who stumped up 75 million dollars with his business partners for the Knight Riders franchise, said he got involved to help promote sport as a profitable career option for young people.

"For me, it will be great to change the lives of youngsters who need to go out and channel their youthful aggression for good purposes rather than putting it to destructive use," he said.

But with the IPL as much a commercial as a sporting exercise, the glitzy, fast-paced tournament tempts stars and corporate firms alike with the promise of big bucks.

"They (Bollywood stars) have got involved because people today are not just actors. They want to be entrepreneurs. They want to explore all business avenues and not just the film industry," film critic Taran Adarsh told AFP.

"The fact that they're coming together for the second time means that the first time was lucrative for them."

Indian cricket's governing body made nearly 1.75 billion dollars from the sale of television rights, 108 million dollars from promotion and about 700 million from franchises, according to cricinfo.com.

About 240 million dollars in sponsorship are riding on the event this year alone, India's Economic Times newspaper said last month.

For Kundra, using Shetty's "tremendous" following in Britain, Australia and South Africa is another way of making Rajasthan Royals a global sporting brand.

"Bollywood joining cricket is about cricket's undersold potential," he said.

Ironically, the only loser could be Indian cinema itself: multiplex owners -- already hit by a producers' strike over box office takings -- fear empty theatres through April and May as millions tune in to the IPL instead.

England duty puts 'Petals' to Flower

Cricket

AFP, London

Throughout his career, England's new team director Andy Flower has shown a willingness to confront adversity that will stand him in good stead as he seeks to rejuvenate an ailing England side.

The 40-year-old made his name as the one real star in an unspectacular Zimbabwean team, a swash-buckling left-handed batsman and wicketkeeper who captained his country and was once ranked the best batsman on the planet.

In 63 Test matches he hit 12 centuries and his 51.54 average puts him in 31st place in the list of all-time best batting averages, just ahead of current England star Kevin Pietersen.

Flower's nickname is 'Petals', but he demonstrated iron-like conviction at the 2003 World Cup, when he and team-mate Henry Olunga donned black armbands in protest at what they called "the death of democracy" under Robert Mugabe's rule in their troubled homeland.

"You don't average 50 in Tests playing for a team such as Zimbabwe without a core of steel and you don't make a public stand against a murderous dictator without a bit of ticker," said

former England captain Mike Atherton.

Flower was named Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 2002 and played for English county side Essex for five years, where he was joined by his younger brother Grant in 2005.

Former England and Essex skipper Graeme Gooch told BBC Radio Five Live that Flower was "the right man for the job".

"I brought Andy Flower to Essex as a player," Gooch said.

"He was a big influence in the dressing room, knows the game inside out and commands a lot of respect from his fellow professionals. I think he will take England forward."

Flower was named assistant to former England coach Peter Moores in May 2007 and stepped into the breach as interim coach during the winter tour of the West Indies after Moores lost his job following a well-publicised clash with then-captain Pietersen.

The new boss faces a gruelling schedule as he looks to emulate compatriot Duncan Fletcher, who led England to a memorable Ashes triumph against Australia in the summer of 2005.

England face a Test and one-day series against West Indies in May before hosting the ICC World Twenty20 in June, with the Ashes series -- the Holy Grail of English cricket -- beginning in Cardiff on July 8.

Standing on a sticky

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Basically it comes down to accepting one's mistakes but in our case, that never really happens. Yes the umpires make mistakes, the cost of which is borne by the players and the clubs but it is not necessary that they make all the mistakes.

In all honesty, it is hard to find a batsman who accepts his dismissal when given leg-before and this is where accountability comes forth. A player knows in the back of his mind that his official could have missed his dismissal, so 'blame it on the umpire'.

Some club officials find it easier to blame the umpires than to go look for the mistakes made by their players. But one must appreciate a small but growing band of officials who make it a point for the captain to give an honest assessment of

the umpires.

This season has been particularly harsh on the umpires. Several incidents have not gone unnoticed while only day before yesterday, a cricket coach had the nerve to run on to the middle and punch the umpire in the face.

When a senior player like Javed Omar runs on to the pitch to argue with a respected umpire, it becomes easier to see how much troublesome umpiring has become in this country.

In spite of such difficulties, the profile of umpiring as a profession has strangely been on the rise in the eyes of some. Former cricketers are making a move in the right direction.

Men like former Bangladesh players Enamul Haque Moni, Anisur Rahman, Morshed Ali Khan, Fahim Muntasir and Sharfuddowla Ibne Shahid Saikat have had a

swift rise and become quite popular with the players. Imran Parvez, the former off-spinner, has created a niche for himself with his own style of hand-signals and conversing with the players. So popular has this bunch become that sometimes they have to remind some of the senior cricketers of the circuit not to act too friendly in the middle.

Definitely, the positive side of umpiring comes from these individuals' performance and their demeanour. They are like a breath of fresh air in an increasingly difficult line of work. Maybe they can take things forward but to change the attitude towards the umpires is almost like creating a tectonic shift.

But attitudes are infectious, and it would be a really welcome change if umpires are seen in a better light.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

| ACROSS | DOWN |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1 Incorrect | 1 Oil-carte |
| 4 "Lost" | 2 Dweller |
| 7 Young | 3 Poultry |
| 11 Equestrian | 4 Beehive |
| 13 Scrooge's cry | 5 State |
| 14 Black-and-white | 6 Desolate |
| 15 Basin | 7 "So be it" |
| 17 One | 8 Total |
| 18 Pristine | 9 Honey-moon |
| 20 Singer | 10 Squared |
| 22 Pinch | 11 Work |
| 24 Completely | 12 Cookie |
| 28 Used | 13 Get |
| | 14 Older |
| | 15 Carnival |
| | 16 Floral |
| | 17 Neckwear |
| | 18 Automaton |
| | 19 For short |
| | 20 Naahim |
| | 21 Is there |
| | 22 Buck's |
| | 23 Mole |
| | 24 Zero |

Solution time: 24 mins.

SASHA MALIA

MOVIES AGENTS

APRILS JANUARY

UPPER LOWER

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39 Disarmed

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25 Raw

26 Oil

27 News-paper

28 Chatters

29 Taj Mahal

30 Paper

31 Flop

35 Kitten's

36 Nosh

40 Mis'

41 neighbors

42 Twangy

45 Ginormous

47 Eager

48 Start

49 Dangling

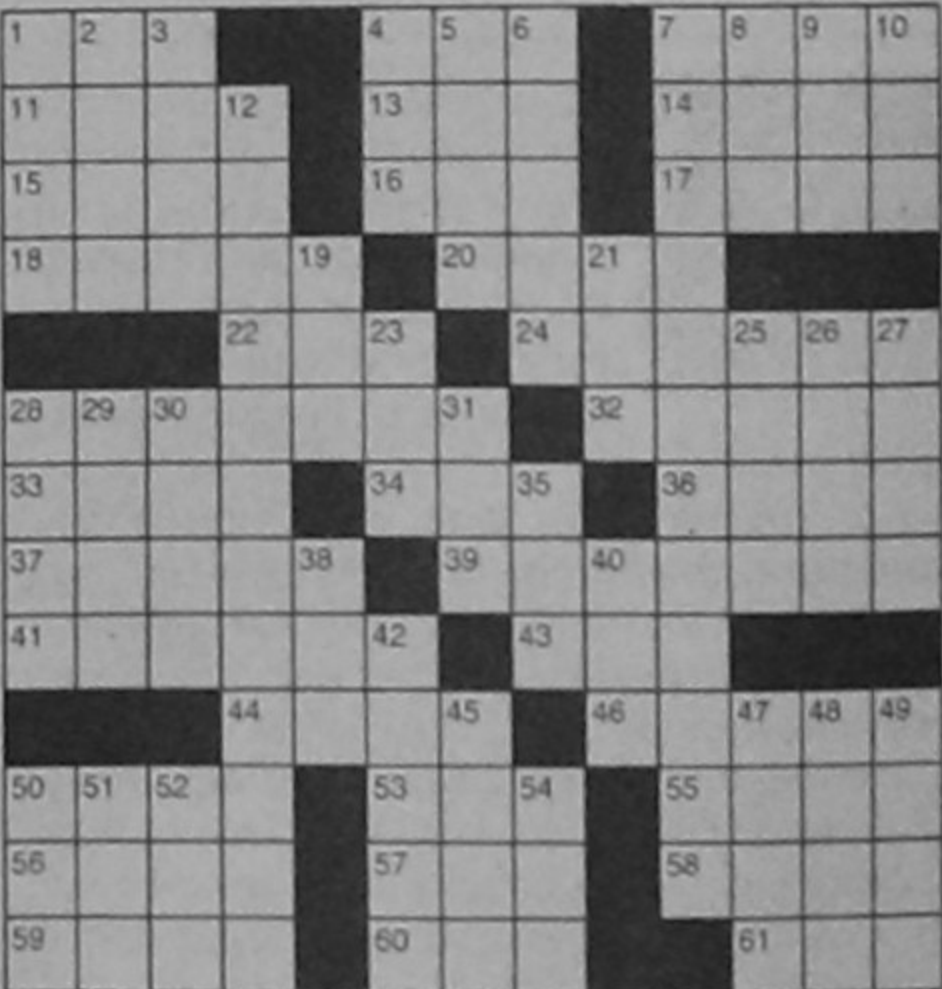
50 Donkey

51 Do

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54 "Family Guy"

daughter



CRYPTOQUIP

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D X Y L U P X Y V K T U Q J K B E :

"Y F I C C D U K C C V K O I C C X D K."

Saturday's Cryptquip: SOME MEANIE TORE

ALL MY DRAWINGS IN TWO, I GUESS YOU

COULD CALL IT AN ART-RENDING STORY.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: C equals F