

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 Vavrinec'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 only 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

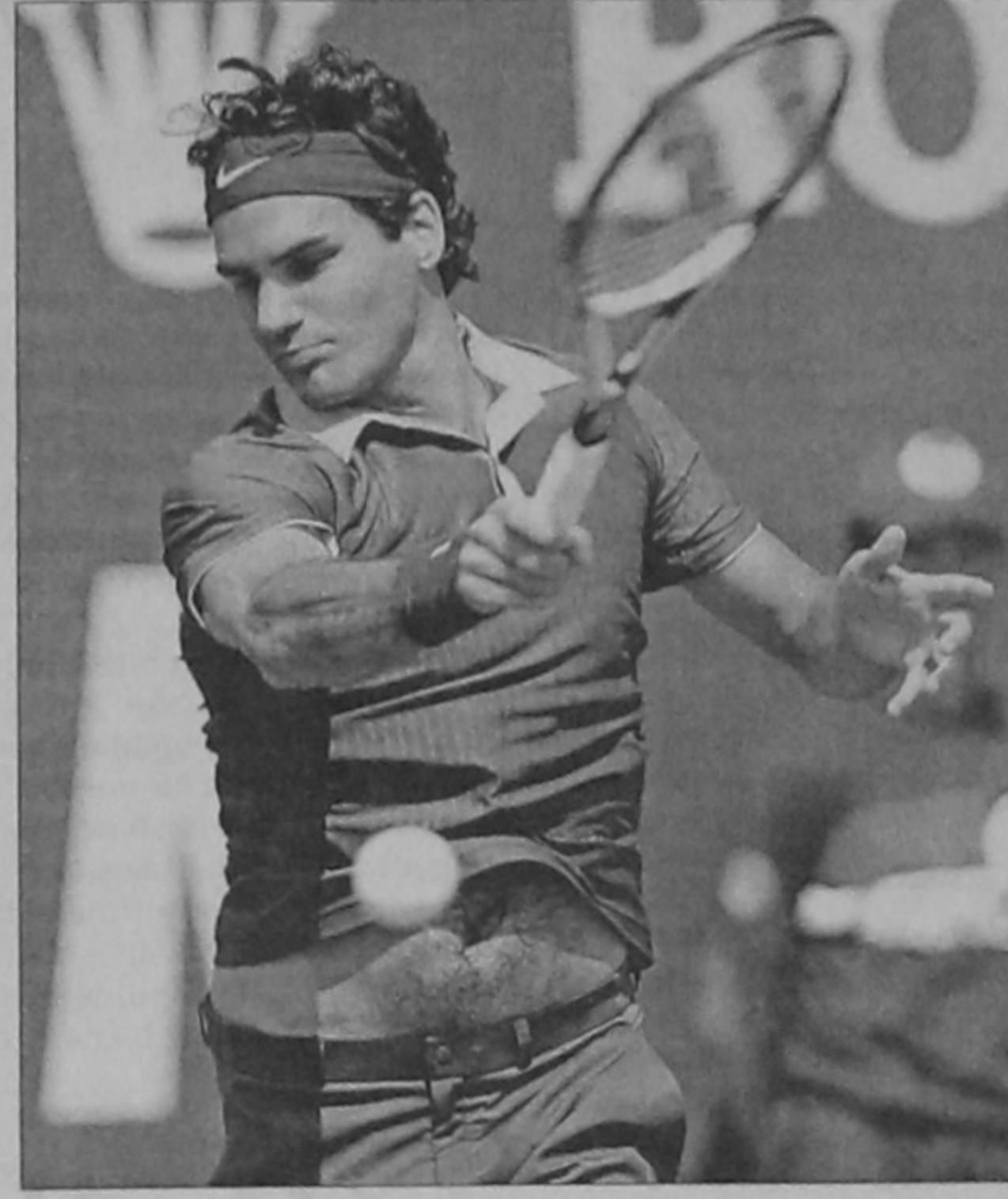
balloon in Basel.

"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 Lapent, 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 this 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

FROM PAGE 17

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-quarter 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-a-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 Sonyumbrella, 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 lucrative.

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, 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 this year.

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 available for only the last two weeks of the IPL.

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 available

for the last five and hopefully the finals," said Shane Warne, 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 Warne's champion team of the services of left-arm seamer Sohail Tanvir, the highest wicket-taker last year with 22 wickets.

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

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 floundering.

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.

Players are paid on a pro-

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, 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 this year.

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 available for only the last two weeks of the IPL.

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 available

LOCAL SNIPS

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 Rabib 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, began today at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessor with the participation of twelve districts.

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

Anybody's

FROM PAGE 17

All-rounder Yusuf Pathan also achieved fame after just one tournament to 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 Kulk