



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova plays forehand against Victoria Azarenka of Belarus in the WTA Rome International semifinal yesterday.

Kuznetsova in Rome final

AFP, Rome

Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova stormed into the WTA Rome claycourt International final with a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Victoria Azarenka on Friday.

Seventh seed Kuznetsova thus reached her second final here after losing to Jelena Jankovic, whom she defeated in Thursday's quarter-final, two years ago.

This result never looked in doubt as she dominated her Belorussian opponent from the start, breezing through the first set with three breaks of serve to one.

However, the sixth seeded teenager broke Kuznetsova in the first game of the second set and looked to make more of a fist of things.

However, the match turned on a controversial point at 2-0 to Azarenka, when on game point Kuznetsova hit a shot that television replays showed had landed just out.

It was called in despite Azarenka's vociferous protests and the 19-year-old let the matter get to her as she lost her way, and five straight games.

She rallied briefly when trailing 5-2 in the second but then a poor service game at 5-4 saw her succumb to the Russian 23-year-old after 1hr 30min on court.

Kuznetsova will play either world number one Dinara Safina or five-time Wimbledon champion Venus Williams in the final.

Jr athletics

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director Khandaker Fazle Rashid handed over a cheque for the sponsorship amount to Athletics Federation president ATM Hayatuzzaman Khan during a press briefing at the conference room in BNS yesterday.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahd Ali Sarker will formally inaugurate the two-day meet as chief guest at 3 pm.

Hamam

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Kuwait, South Korea, Japan, and Saudi Arabia and was highlighted by allegations of corruption and vicious personal attacks.

So distrustful were some AFC members that Blatter was forced to bring a Swiss notary and lawyer with him to act as an independent supervisor of the vote, amid fears there could be irregularities.

Bin Hammam's detractors were also concerned about his proposal to move AFC headquarters from Malaysia and a plan to sign a 12-year marketing deal with World Sport Group.

But before the vote, Bin Hammam asked for the agenda item dealing with the plan to move AFC House to be removed, which was greeted with wide applause.

Bin Hammam said he had met with Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak on Thursday and won a promise that he would personally look into the AFC's conditions to remain in the country.

Malaysia has hosted the AFC since 1965 and its first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, served as its president for 24 years.

All 46 members of the AFC voted after Bin Hammam asked that Kuwait, which was expected to be barred for not having a properly elected committee, was allowed to take part.

The Qatari said he wanted them to vote in the interests of fair play.

Afghanistan, Brunei, Laos, Mongolia, and East Timor also voted after concerns that they might be excluded were ironed out.

Warne slams Cardiff Test

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

Australia cricketing legend Shane Warne says the decision to stage the first Ashes Test in Cardiff is a "disgrace".

The 39-year-old feels the opening match should be held at Lord's, as it was in the 2005 series, which England won 2-1.

Cardiff's Swalec Stadium is on the Test schedule in place of Old Trafford and was chosen as the venue for the first 2009 Ashes Test starting on 8 July.

"How Cardiff get the first Test match in the Ashes is just a disgrace," Warne told Sky Sports.

"I don't know how they get that, I really couldn't believe that. The Lord's Test match should always be number one."

"The buzz around Lord's [in 2005] was amazing. The lead-up to the Ashes series was phenomenal."

Australia won that first Test at Lord's in 2005 before eventually losing the series 2-1.

But the England team requested that this year's series starts at a different venue because Lord's spurs on the tourists.

"It was one of those series that was great for the game of cricket," Warne said.

"It really captured everyone's imagination, it captured non-cricket lovers' imaginations in England."

"That is why I reckon the first Test match should always be at Lord's."

Preparations for the first Test at Glamorgan's £9.6m revamped Swalec Stadium have not gone entirely smoothly.

There was criticism of the ground when England played South Africa in the fifth one-day international on 3 September last year.

The match was washed out after just 13 minutes and three overs, and the ground staff were criticised for the way they covered the pitch when the rain arrived.

A further £3m was spent over the winter to improve the drainage and outfield which Glamorgan chairman Paul Russell admitted was "pathetic" and "hopeless".

Like the slasher

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Watching Matthew Hayden bat is like looking at a character from a cricket video game. There is a surreal element to the way he bats. You think it can only happen in Xbox. He swipes, heaves, walks down the track, hits one-handed sixes and does almost whatever he wants. Imperiousness is his calling card.

Either side of the rain break the Centurion crowd lapped it up. They loved his violence, especially those watching in the bar. Hayden's batting might not have been appreciated while playing against South Africa but in the IPL he is a big hit with the locals. Collective gasps of incredulity went up with several shots; vodka shots were downed after watching the replays on the big screen.

Alternatively, Hayden's 89 off 58 balls, with eight fours and six sixes, was like watching a slasher movie. There was a shot off Sreesanth that cap-

tured the spirit. He heaved his heavy frame across the stumps and, as Sreesanth tried to cramp him with a short ball, he went for a pull, taking the bottom hand off the handle, allowing him to complete the arcing swing. The white ball soared through the dark sky and settled somewhere in the long-leg stands.

"He is a particularly over-rated bowler," Hayden said later, indicating he deliberately went after Sreesanth. "He loses his cool under pressure." There was a bit of needle between the two players. Asked what the chat was about, Hayden said: "It's not worth repeating."

Many of his shots were definitely worth repeating. If he was brutal against Sreesanth, he was dismissive of the spin. He walked down the track to Piyush Chawla and lunged forward to waft over wide long-on. Then there were more of his typical heaves over midwicket.

When chatting with Hayden about his batting, he uses regular phrases such as "I am in the zone most times I

am out in the middle" and "there is no bowler that worries me". Arrogance and false bravado to us, perhaps, a statement of fact to him, like the sun rising in the east.

Perhaps it's his way of not allowing any self-doubt to creep in. When seeing some of the shots he plays, you can see why he thinks that way. Though he makes it seem ridiculously easy, the real secret lies in his practice.

During his international career, he was probably the batsman who practised the hardest before a game. He would hit an absurdly high number of balls in the nets. The rest of the Australians and the opposition would pack up and go but Hayden would still be hitting the balls. It's no different in the IPL.

When asked how he was enjoying the IPL he said: "Great fun to be back. Just going tuk tuk [he gestures his swipes over midwicket] and they are all connecting well." If he keeps knocking them around like he has been doing, Chennai should make it through to the semi-finals easily.

Eng thrash Windies

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26-year-old Durham quick, whose otherwise dream Test debut had seen him take two wickets for four runs in six balls in the morning, to add to his first innings haul.

Onions in a first session halved to an hour by rain, sparked a collapse that saw the West Indies lose three wickets for nine runs in 12 balls on what was still a good batting pitch.

At lunch the tourists were 80 for five and facing a humiliating defeat.

Nash and Ramdin had both yet to get off the mark when play resumed and Nash was still on nought when an outside edge off James Anderson flew past the diving Swann at third slip.

Ramdin's cut four off Onions raised the century stand before his reprieve next ball.

Another cut boundary off Onions took Ramdin to his sixth fifty in his 35th Test off 84 balls with 11 boundaries.

Nash followed him to the landmark soon afterwards with a commanding drive against Swann that saw him to a fourth fifty in his eighth Test.

The West Indies had survived the first 10 overs of the day when Onions, whose first innings haul included three wickets in an over, had Lendl Simmons (21) held behind square by Cook.

Then, for the second time in the match, Swann had Shivnarine Chanderepaul, currently ranked as the world's number one batsman, out cheaply.

The left-hander, who never looked comfortable against the ball turning away from him, did at least avoid the indignity of a pair.

But he'd made just four when he pushed forward uncertainly against Swann and gave a bat-pad catch to Bopara at silly point.

SCOREBOARD
Final scoreboard on the third day of the first Test between England and the West Indies at Lord's here on Friday:

ENGLAND: First innings 377 (Bopara 143, Swann 63 n o; Edwards 6-92)

WEST INDIES: First innings 152 (Onions 5-38, Swann 3-16)

WEST INDIES: Second innings (overnight 39-2)
Gayle c Swann b Anderson 0
Smith b Onions 41
Sarwan b Anderson 1
Simmons c Cook b Onions 21
Chanderepaul c Bopara b Swann 4
Nash c Cook b Broad 81
Ramdin b Broad 61
Taylor lbw b Swann 15
Benn b Swann 0
Edwards c Breenan b Broad 2
Baker not out 2
Extras: (b-8, lb-18, w-2) 28
Total: (all out in 72.2 overs) 256
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-22, 3-70, 4-75, 5-79, 6-222, 7-243, 8-

246, 9-249, 10-256.
To bat: Benn, Edwards, Baker.
Bowler O M R W
Anderson 15 6 38 2
Broad 19.2 2 64 3
Breenan 7 3 17 0
Swann 17 4 39 3
Onions 12 2 64 2
Bopara 2 0 8 0

ENGLAND: Second innings
Strauss not out 14
Cook not out 14
Extras: (nb-4) 28
Total (0 wks, 6.1 overs) 32
Bowler O M R W
Edwards 3.1 0 12 0
Taylor 3 0 20 0
Toss: West Indies
Umpires: Steve Davis (AUS) and Asoka de Silva (SRI)
Result: England win by 10 wickets
Series: England lead two-match series 1-0

Unforgettable

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1-0 down in this two-match series ahead of next week's Test at Onions's Riverside home ground.

"It's got to be an amazing fight. We've got to bat exceptionally well and just hang in there. We just have to bat well," the former opener, a member of the Australia side that lost after enforcing the follow-on against England in 1981 at Headingley in one of the most dramatic Tests of all time, explained.

Amit in IPL 'chuck' list

CRICINFO, undated

Amit Singh, the Rajasthan Royals right-arm medium-fast bowler, has been reported for a suspect action. He is the second bowler, after Kamran Khan, also of Rajasthan, to be reported during the current IPL.

Daryl Harper and K Hariharan, the on-field umpires for the IPL game between Rajasthan and Royal Challengers Bangalore at Centurion on May 7, observed that Amit, 27, had a suspect action on certain deliveries. The two on-field umpires and TV umpire Tyrone Wijewardena reviewed footage of the game and believed Amit's action needed further scrutiny. The matter has now been referred to the Rajasthan management and the IPL's technical committee.

Amit, who can continue to play until he is proven guilty of an illegal action, was Man of the Match in Thursday's game in Centurion, taking 4 for 19 as Rajasthan won by seven wickets. He has played two matches, with seven wickets at an average of four.

Third in a row for Hughes

AFP, London

Australian opener Phil Hughes hammered his third century in successive county championship matches on Thursday as he extended his inside-knowledge of the English game ahead of the Ashes.

The 20-year-old New South Welshman, who is playing for Middlesex on a six-week deal, plundered an unbeaten 134 from just 166 balls to lead his county to 200 for two in the Division Two match against Surrey at The Oval.

He also hit 21 fours and dominated an opening stand of 165 with Billy Godleman (37).

Hughes even managed to get under the nose of fiery South African pace bowler Andre Nel whom he cut for successive boundaries to reach his century.

Nel was so enraged that he then sent down a high full toss that Hughes did well to fend away.

The Australian immediately protested to Nel who then apologised before going up to the batsman at the end of the over and putting an arm around his shoulders.

Earlier Mark Ramprakash could add just seven to his overnight 126, but Chris Schofield chipped in with 47 as Surrey were all out for 388.

Daredevils

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put on 42 without alarm before the latter charged down the track to Duminy and was stumped by Shah.

Gambhir played a poor shot in the next over and was caught on the cover fence by Ronchi off Harbhajan Singh.

Tillakaratne Dilshan and AB De Villiers came together and dug a hole for themselves, as they allowed the rate to climb from 5.5 to 8.5.

The spin of Duminy and Harbhajan brought Mumbai back into the game, but De Villiers crashed 19 off Tendulkar in the 16th over and this enabled Delhi to cruise home.

Dilshan fell to Lasith Malinga in the 18th over, but De Villiers steered Delhi to a seven-wicket success with seven balls remaining.

Kumble still

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wickets to end their winning streak.

But Kumble, who took over the captaincy of the Bangalore outfit after Kevin Pietersen's departure, feels the defeat won't be a big setback to their momentum and said from here on for them every game is final.

"We have won three out of the last four games we have played. We still have five. So the next game is against Mumbai Indians and obviously we have done well against them. We would take that kind of confidence. You can't think that we have lost this game and we have lost momentum. I don't think so," Kumble was quoted as saying by the official IPL website.

"I think every game is a different game, new game. We will have to adapt to the conditions and try and force a win. Again if we win that, we will be again part of the top five. I think, till the last few games we are still in the race. So we would like to look at it in that sense and approach every game as a final," he added.

Asia Cup starts today

Hockey

AFP, Kuantan

Asia's top seven hockey nations, led by defending champions India, begin their quest for a place in the 2010 World Cup when the Asia Cup starts on Malaysia's east coast Saturday.

The Indians, winners in 2003 and 2007 and in top form currently, vie with South Korea as early favourites for the title. However, Malaysia, former three-time champions Pakistan, Japan and China will put up a tough fight.

Only the winner of the May 9-16 event will gain an automatic invitation to the 2010 World Cup, which will be held in New Delhi.

Other hopefuls will have to ensure they finish in the top-five of the tournament, held in the Malaysian resort town of Kuantan, to earn a chance for a World Cup berth through the qualifying stage in November. India as the host nation

have already secured their ticket, but coach Herender Singh brushed aside any thoughts of his team taking it easy in the tournament.

"We are here to win and nothing else matters. As hosts we are assured of a place in the 2010 World Cup. But we want to show that we are the top team in Asia. We want to earn our place as champions. So there is no question of us taking it easy," he said.

The Indians come into the tournament after having won the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup Malaysia last month. They are the third-highest ranked in the tournament, behind South Korea and Pakistan, according to the International Hockey Federation's ranking.

Pakistan coach Shahid Ali Khan said his team are also ready to win the title they last won in 1989.

"We have recalled four players who were playing in the Netherlands, for this assignment. We want to win here to avoid going through the qualifying session in

November," he said.

"I believe that we have a much stronger team than the one that played in the Azlan Shah Cup last month," he said, after Pakistan finished third in the event.

India, Pakistan and China are in Group B of the Asia Cup while South Korea head Group A with Malaysia, Japan and Bangladesh.

South Korea, the reigning Asian Games champions and two-time former Asia Cup champions, have a mixed team of youngsters and experienced hands.

"It will not be easy but I feel confident with this group of players. They showed up well in training and we can beat any team on our day. But our aim is to first make the semi-finals and go on from there," said coach Lim Jung-woo.

"I would rate Malaysia in our group as one of the 'contenders' while India and Pakistan in Group B will pose a major hurdle as well," he said.

'India, Pakistan T20 favourites'

AFP, Dubai



Pakistan and India are favourites to win next month's World Twenty20 tournament, as both have shown good form in the game's rapid-fire version, Pakistan's stand-in captain Misbah-ul-Haq said Friday.

"Both Pakistan and India have been doing very well in Twenty20 cricket, so I think both have a very good chance of winning the World Twenty20," Haq said after Pakistan's seven-wicket win over Australia here Thursday.

Pakistan, led by Haq after regular captain Younus Khan pulled out due to fever, rode on a career-best 4-8 by paceman Umar Gul and leg-spinner Shahid Afridi (3-14) to dismiss Australia for a low score of 108.

In reply, Kamran Akmal hit a fiery 59 to help Pakistan reach their target with 3.5 overs to

spare -- an emphatic win that Haq said would lift his team's spirits ahead of the World Twenty20 starting in England next month.

"I think this win is an indicator of where we stand," said Haq, who scored 24 and added 85 for the third wicket with Akmal. "This win will be a great morale booster for the team," which lost the preceding one-day series 3-2.

Thursday's victory was Pakistan's 17th out of 20 Twenty20 matches it has played since this popular brand of cricket was introduced in 2005.

Pakistan finished runners-up to India in the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup, held in South Africa two years ago.

Haq said he believed Pakistan's domestic Twenty20 championship had helped to build the team.

"We have been playing a Twenty20 tournament every year and that has matured us. Fortunately, we are again playing that event in Pakistan before going to England," said Haq.

Safe tour pleases PCB

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

Pakistan's cricket authorities breathed a sigh of relief Friday after safely hosting their series against Australia on neutral venues, saying it would help to build long-lasting relationships.

Pakistan was forced to move the series to Dubai and Abu Dhabi after Australia refused to play in the troubled country over security fears.

The five-match one-day series and a one-off Twenty20 match were Pakistan's first since terrorists attacked the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March.

Seven Sri Lankan players and their assistant coach were injured in the attacks, in which eight policemen were killed.

The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) director of cricket operations Zakir Khan said the safe hosting of the series was a great satisfaction.

"Australia co-operated very well for this series and we got two very cordial and welcoming hosts in Dubai and Abu Dhabi," said Khan.

"It was great to have this series in a safe

environment, for which we are thankful to our hosts."

Australia, who have not toured Pakistan since 1998 over security fears, had not played Pakistan in a one-day match since 2005.

Khan thanked the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government and cricket officials for helping to make the series a success.

"Dubai and Abu Dhabi governments provided the infrastructure and police to look after the security of the series and everything was done in a meticulous manner," said Khan, a former Pakistan paceman.

He said both Dubai and Abu Dhabi were world-class cricket venues.

"Dubai has been a wonderful addition to the cricket grounds of the world and I hope they host more international cricket in future," Khan said.

"Abu Dhabi has been hosting cricket for three, four years now and it has made its place at the world level," said Khan.

As security fears persist in Pakistan, they are also likely to play their series against New Zealand in the UAE in October-November.

'Fatigue prime fear'

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Gary Kirsten, the India coach, says mental fatigue will be his team's biggest challenge during the World Twenty20 in England next month. The event starts on June 5 but India play their first warm-up game on June 1, just seven days after the IPL ends in South Africa. Kirsten also believes India, the defending champions, will be under added pressure during the ICC tournament but says the team has shown it is capable of handling such situations.

"The Indian players have been on the road for a long time and the biggest challenge will be mental fatigue," Kirsten told Cricinfo. "But they have enormous pride when representing India and have become a tight unit over the past few months. I'm sure they will look forward to reuniting and playing for their country."

The Indian players have been almost living out of their suitcases since they left Mumbai for the New Zealand tour on February 20. They got a few days off after the series ended on April 7 before leaving for the IPL, which began on April 18. They return home for a few days again when the IPL ends on May 24 - the entire 15-member World Twenty20 squad is playing in the league - before leaving for England to play their first day/night warm-up game against New Zealand at Lord's. India take on Bangladesh in their first game of the tournament on June 6 in Trent Bridge.

But Kirsten, who took over as India coach in 2008, said he was confident the team would be able to handle the pressure when defending the title they won in 2007. "When you are defending champions there will always be added pressure," Kirsten said. "That goes with the territory of high-performing teams. This team has played in many pressure situations since the Twenty20 World Cup in 2007 and has shown what they are capable of."

How different would the conditions be in England for the World Twenty20? It's something all international teams, he said, have to come to terms with. "Every country has its own unique conditions which each team and individual needs to come to terms with," he said. "The players are aware of those conditions and what is required to give themselves the best chance of performing. Most of the Indian players have

played in England and know what to expect."

India have sported a stable look over the five Twenty20 internationals they have played since the 2007 world title victory - winning two and losing three. In fact, there have been only two changes in the team from the 16-member squad for the last two games they played in New Zealand, and the 15-member World Twenty20 squad that was announced on Monday.

There is an argument that such stability could also lead to complacency among players in the team but Kirsten was quick to dismiss such suggestions. "Experienced players understand the demands and pressures of World Cup tournaments," he said. "Throw in a few talented and fearless young players and you have a great mix in the team. There is certainly no danger of complacency within the Indian team. We pride ourselves in taking each game as it comes and giving 100% on a daily basis while representing Team India."

Giving a hint of the team's gameplan for the world event, Kirsten said he believes spin will play a major role in Twenty20 cricket. India have only two full-time spinners - Harbhajan Singh and Pragnan Ojha - in their World Twenty20 squad but have a rich variety of part-time options to choose from: Yuvraj Singh, Yusuf Pathan, Virender Sehwag, Ravindra Jadeja, Suresh Raina and Rohit Sharma.

Moving on to the ongoing IPL, Kirsten, who is based in Cape Town, said the tournament has benefited young Indian cricketers immensely. He put forward the growth of Yusuf Pathan's game at the last IPL, as an example. "The IPL provides a great opportunity for young Indian cricketers to show what they are capable of in a high-profile environment," he said. "They also get to mix with, and learn from, successful international cricketers. This can only be of benefit to Indian cricket. Performances during the IPL can definitely be a stepping stone to achieving higher honours. Yusuf Pathan was one example