

Maria hungry for success

Tennis

AFP, Warsaw

Maria Sharapova said she was gunning for Grand Slam glory again after making her comeback from a nine-month injury lay-off with a first-round victory at the WTA Warsaw Open on Monday.

The 22-year-old former world number one was taken to three sets by Italy's Tathiana Garbin before eventually prevailing 6-1, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3 and said she was delighted to be back in action.

"In these nine months, the only thing that I've accomplished is a good pasta carbonara," she joked.

"At the end of the day, that's not my specialty. My specialty is to go out and compete in Grand Slams."

The Russian has slipped to a world ranking of 126 after being laid low by an injury to her right shoulder and she admitted that the road to recovery had not been easy.

"Right now I've been not playing for nine months, so everything is a test," she said. "Every single day is a test, especially after you have surgery."

Sharapova appeared to be cruising to a comfortable victory when serving for the match at 5-3 up in the second set, but a nervy service game enabled her opponent to get back into the match.

The three-time major-winner, though, said her errors had nothing to do with her problematic shoulder.

"I think it was definitely me trying to finish the match off and being a bit more nervous in that second set," she said.

"It's a whole different ball game when you haven't been there in a while and it throws you off a little bit."

"There you are after nine months, you have an opportunity to win your first match back so you start thinking of everything that has gone on and how you've planned to use the present time."

Sharapova, who has titles at Wimbledon (2004), the US Open (2006) and the Australian Open (2008) under her belt, revealed that the time off had made her feel like a returning veteran.

"I feel like I'm 30," she said. "It's definitely strange."

"I feel like I've been around for so many years and you come back after nine months and you're eating dry pasta without sauce and you're thinking: 'Oh, is this what I came back for?' But then you go out on the court and it's like: 'This is what I came back for!'"

Sharapova, though, rubbished suggestions that her extended lay-off might have dulled some of her appetite for the game.

"I don't think I've done enough," she said. "I feel I can accomplish a lot more. I may be 22 years old but I'm not done. I have many things to do and many things to accomplish and I'm a girl on a mission."



PHOTO: AFP

Former world number one Maria Sharapova of Russia makes a forehand return against Tathiana Garbin of Italy during their Warsaw Open match on Monday.

Niaz shares third place

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Niaz Murshed is sharing the third place with ten other players in the Open Section of the 8th Asian Continental Chess Championship, a qualifying meet for the World Cup Chess 2009, after the seventh round of matches ended at the Subic Freeport, Olongapo City in Philippines yesterday.

Niaz secured 4.5 points after drawing with GM Filippov of Uzbekistan.

Two other Bangladeshi Grand Masters Ziaur Rahman and Enamul Hossain Rajib also earned 4 points each, while Fide Master Abu Sufian Shakil earned 3 points from seven matches.

In the 7th round, Zia lost to GM Nguyen Ngoc Traong Son of Vietnam, Rajib lost to Ding Liren of China while Shakil beat Nguyen Hoang Nam of Vietnam.

GM Surya Shekhar Ganguly and GM Sandipan Chanda of India jointly lead the points-table now.

In the women's section, Shamima Akter Liza earned 3 points from seven matches beating Perena Cathirin of Philippines.

Ijaz freed on bail

AFP, Lahore

Former star Pakistan batsman Ijaz Ahmed was freed on bail on Tuesday ahead of his trial on fraud charges for allegedly giving a client bad cheques worth over one million dollars.

Ahmed said he was relieved to get bail after a six-week spell in jail.

"We will now follow the case as I am in the right and will fight until my name is cleared," the 40-year-old former cricketer told AFP.

"The last three months have been nightmarish."

He was arrested in March accused of giving false cheques worth 10.05 million rupees (1.30 million dollars) to a client. Another plea for bail on medical grounds was rejected last month.

Ahmed, who also works in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) national academy in Lahore, played 60 Tests and 250 one-day internationals for Pakistan from 1987 to 2001, and was a member of Pakistan's World Cup winning team in 1992.

After his arrest, he was admitted to a local hospital following a bout of asthma and breathing problems.

Tushar

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made 56 off 110 balls that featured six boundaries.

Hasanul Banna (21) and Hasan Zico (14) were the other batsmen reach double figures.

Besides Tushar, pacer Golam Kibria picked up three wickets for 11 runs.

In reply, Biman lost three early wickets for just 22 but a 59-run fourth wicket stand between Tushar and skipper Sanwar Hossain helped to reach the target 116-4 in 24.3 overs. Sanwar hit an unbeaten 31 off 48 balls with two fours.

New ball bowler Ali Hossain captured two wickets for 16 runs.

Captain's caution

Cricket

AFP, Chester-le-Street

England captain Andrew Strauss told England to expect "a very stern test" when they faced Australia in this year's Ashes following their series trouncing of the West Indies.

Strauss's side proved far too strong in home conditions for their opponents from the Caribbean and won the second of this two-Test campaign by an innings and 83 runs at the Riverside here on Monday.

That gave England the series 2-0 after they'd won the first Test at Lord's by a crushing 10 wickets and saw them regain the Wisden Trophy they'd lost earlier this year in the Caribbean after a 1-0 reverse in a five-match series.

In a match where the whole of the second day was washed out, England made 569 for six declared with opener Alastair Cook's Test-best 160 the centrepiece of their total.

Man-of-the-series Ravi Bopara helped Essex team-mate Cook add 213 for the second wicket with an innings of 108 that followed his Test-best 143 at Lord's.

Lancashire swing bowler James Anderson, well supported by the rest of England's bowling attack, returned match figures of nine for 125 in a Test where the West Indies were made to follow-on.

"The real positive is how clinical we were," Strauss told reporters.

"Once we got on top, we stayed on top. By and large we took our chances," he added after England's first series win in their last four Test campaigns.

England won the last Ashes on English soil in 2005 only to be thrashed 5-0 in Australia the last time they met their oldest Test foes in 2006/07.

Strauss, who played in both series, was in no doubt about the scale of the task confronting

England come July's first Test against Australia in Cardiff.

"When we step out in Cardiff, this means nothing, but from the team point of view it was nice to remember what it is like to win."

"Once we start the Ashes series, we are back to square one again," the opening batsman added. "This has got relevance but we can't just rely on the fact we've beaten the West Indies twice to carry us."

"The Ashes are going to be a very stern test for us," insisted Strauss, appointed England captain in January after Kevin Pietersen was stripped of the role following the South African-born batsman's falling-out with then coach Peter Moores.

Bopara, who has now scored hundreds in his last three Test innings and appears to have made England's problem position of No 3 his own, was delighted to have found form in the team's final Test series before the Ashes.

"When I came into this side I said I wanted to make a difference. I hope I did that in this series," Bopara said. "I'm glad it's been in the series before the Ashes. This is a stepping stone."

West Indies were only in England at this time of the season after Sri Lanka, England's scheduled opponents, pulled out because of their players' commitments in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Chris Gayle, the West Indies' captain who was criticised for turning up at Lord's two days before the first Test following a stint in the lucrative Twenty20 IPL tournament in South Africa, said he hoped his side could bounce back in the upcoming three one-dayers against England.

That series starts at Headingley on Thursday and opening batsman Gayle said: "Congratulations to Andrew Strauss and his team but hopefully we look to the one-day internationals now."

"Back home in the winter it was totally different but here we played some poor cricket, had some chances and didn't make the best of it."

Strauss very happy

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However, Strauss, looking ahead to the first Ashes Test in July in Cardiff, added: "The reality is that when we step out in Cardiff this means nothing really. The only thing is from a team's point of view is that it's nice to remember what it's like to win."

"But once we start that Ashes series it's back to square one and we need to earn the right to win Test matches."

"I think this has got relevance but what I'm saying is that we can't just rely on the fact we've beaten the West Indies twice to carry us through. We need to realise that the Ashes series is going to be a very stern test for us."

"Understandably, everyone wants to talk about the Ashes now but there's still a lot of cricket to be played," added Strauss of a season which features three one-dayers against the West Indies - starting at

Headingley on Thursday - and the World Twenty20 before the Australia Tests get underway.

Strauss was thrust into the England captaincy in January when star batsman Kevin Pietersen was stripped of the role following a row with Peter Moores that cost the then England coach his job.

Andy Flower, formerly Moores's assistant, was put in temporary charge in the Caribbean but this was the Zimbabwe great's first series since being confirmed in the post on a permanent basis.

"Things settled down pretty quickly after the upheaval - which is very encouraging, because it means the players themselves are committed to playing for England," Strauss recalled.

Strauss was particularly pleased by the "clinical" way England saw off the West Indies. "We got on top in both Tests - and once we got on top,

we stayed on top. By and large, we took our chances; we kept the pressure on and got what we deserved."

"I'm pretty delighted with how things are going at the moment."

He was also encouraged by the progress of both the 22-year-old Broad, described by Anderson as having a "30-year-old's head on his shoulders", and the Lancashire quick.

"In the West Indies they both bowled exceptionally well and didn't get what they deserved - because the wickets were very flat," Strauss said.

"Jimmy's control with the swinging ball is exceptional, and he's going to be a threat against anyone when it's swinging."

"At the same time, when it's flat we've learned a lot from what happened in the West Indies - and we've got a plan B there as well."

Imam's 5th death anniversary today

SPORTS REPORTER

Renowned sports organizer Zafar Imam's 5th death anniversary will be observed today.

He was notable in the international arena for his work in sports and was the recipient of the national award.

Imam passed away on May 20, 2004 at the age of 63 after a heart attack.

He was born in Rajshahi and dedicated his life to sports and was involved with different sports organizations in various capacities during his distinguished career.

Inter-district volleyball

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Vaizan Smriti Volleyball Tournament, an inter district volleyball tournament began at the Pabna Town Hall premises yesterday.

In the opening day 'Chachkia' Volleyball team defeated 'Shalgaria' Volleyball team 3-0. 'Chandai' Volleyball team will play Ambition Club in today's match.

A total of 10 volleyball teams are taking part in this event which is being sponsored by 'Crystal Group'.

Managing Director of Square Group Anjan Chowdhuri Pintu, a noted sports organizer of the country inaugurated the tournament as the chief guest.

Ponting backs

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"England might be dreading the decision to allow him to go over and play as they were right from the start," said Ponting, referring to the argument against allowing Australia internationals to "train up" in English conditions ahead of an Ashes summer.

"But I would prefer for Phil to save a few runs up and not make them all right now, we need some for later on in the year."

"He is a terrific young guy and a terrific player and I am sure he will have a good Ashes campaign for us."

Ponting named five fast bowlers he thinks could do a good job in England.

England lose

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James said he had been carrying the injury for 18 months. "I have to look at the bigger picture. I want to be fit for the start of next season and I trust England to do well without me."

Green has yet to play in a competitive fixture for his country but has had a good season with West Ham and collected a second cap in February's friendly defeat by Spain.

England travel to Kazakhstan with a five point lead over Croatia after winning their first five matches in group six. Having beaten the Kazakhs 5-1 at Wembley in October, they will be confident of extending that winning run.

'Cardiff okay for Ashes'

Cricket

AFP, London

Glamorgan director of cricket Matthew Maynard insisted the county's Cardiff HQ would have no problems staging the first Ashes Test in July after a pitch there was labelled "poor".

An England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) pitch panel including Mike Denness, England's captain during their losing Ashes tour of Australia back in 1974/75, was convened to consider the pitch used for the Friends Provident Trophy one-day match at Cardiff on Tuesday, May 12 between Glamorgan and Essex.

They upheld the umpires' decision that the Sophia Gardens pitch had demonstrated excessive turn and should therefore be rated "poor" after the Welsh county were bowled out for 124 in a match where Essex and Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria took four wickets for 16 runs.

Glamorgan were penalised two points but the penalty won't be applied this season. Instead it will take effect in the 2010 Friends Provident Trophy.

Spin is one of the few areas where England appear to have an advantage over Australia, and Cardiff - which will be staging its first Test when the Ashes opener stars there on July 8 - has long had a reputation for taking turn.

That has led to widespread speculation that England, unusually for a home Test in recent

seasons, will play two spinners, most likely Graeme Swann and Monty Panesar, in the Welsh capital.

Glamorgan lost both their chief executive and their groundsman towards the end of last season but former England batsman Maynard was confident the pitch prepared by Keith Exton, previously at Leicestershire, for what will be the first Test ever played in Cardiff, would be up to the mark.

"I've played on a lot of wickets worse than the one we used last Tuesday and they haven't been marked as poor," he said.

"Obviously we haven't played on the Test wicket at all but the ground looks an absolute picture, the pitch looks fantastic and I'm sure Keith will get the Ashes strip just right," Maynard added.

"He's a very experienced groundsman and he knows exactly what he is doing."

"I can't see there being any issues whatsoever before the Test match."

Australia leg-spin great Shane Warne for one believes both Swann and Panesar will be in England's Ashes side.

"It's been a long time since English spin bowlers have had an impact on an Ashes series, but it looks as though that could change this summer," Warne wrote in his column in The Times last week.

"Now that Graeme Swann has established himself in the team and Monty Panesar is waiting in the wings, I think there's a real possibility that England will take on Australia with two spinners in their side."

Siddons targets India

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cliché but we are trying to beat India first, that's our main target," said Siddons.

On the issue of whether captain Ashraf and his deputy Mashrafe have missed out on some valuable preparation ahead of the competition, the coach kept his fingers crossed and considered the practice matches will be good enough for them to turn in some good performances.

"I pushed for Mash (Mashrafe Bin Mortaza) and Ash (Mohammad Ashraf) to join the squad early as it's important to gel together as a team. It's a big sacrifice on their part as they are going to come here and just a day later they will fly out to England."

"They are not getting the match practice they need at the moment so it's important for them to join us for the practice games in England. If they have some success they will be ready. Ashraf holds the key for us to win games as he is the number three batter and it's important for him to fire early

on if we want to win games," added the Australian.

The rookies in the team Shamsur Rahman and Mohammad Mithun look forward to making the playing eleven in their debut season but the shaven-headed coach thinks they need to work on a few things before they can sustain their careers at the international stage.

"I haven't seen too much of the two new boys although we have been working with them. They have got issues as most of the guys who have gone through our system have had like backlift and stuff but I am not toying too much with them and just letting them play their instinctive game."

"But for them to be long term players a few changes need to be made and then there's the added pressure of facing the media and meet the board members and cameras in their faces; it's all so nerve wracking. We just need to give them some time and they will be okay," said Siddons.

Quarterfinal for Punjab, Chennai

PTI, Durbani

With a semifinal berth at stake, Chennai Super Kings, smarting from a stunning defeat to tournament-laggards Kolkata Knight Riders, take on Kings XI Punjab in a do-or-die encounter of the Indian Premier League here on Wednesday.

Chennai are currently placed second With 15 points after notching up seven wins from 13 matches. Just one point behind them is Punjab.

Chennai were on course for a semifinal spot but Kolkata spoiled their party last night with a seven-wicket victory. Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men now face a do-or-die match against an equally desperate Punjab, on a roll with two consecutive wins.

Even without their run-machine Matthew Hayden, Chennai posted 188 against the Kolkata team but couldn't defend the total, due to poor bowling.

Winning 2018 WC bid

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is politics in all different sports throughout the world and I know how difficult it was getting the Olympics to our country."

"The World Cup is a different ball game. It will be difficult, there will be hard work and lots of ups and downs along the way but the end result is the most important thing."

"If we get what we want and get the World Cup to our country then we'll prove that it will be a success."

"We, as a country, are always ready for big competitions. If someone was to say next week we'll stage a tournament in England, I don't think there are many other countries who

would be ready to do that."

Beckham and his international teammate Wayne Rooney weren't even born when England last staged the sport's biggest single event back in 1966, a tournament that culminated in victory for the hosts in the final against West Germany.

Images of England captain Bobby Moore holding aloft the Jules Rimet trophy and Geoff Hurst's controversial second goal in the final are still etched into the nation's sporting memory.

Beckham will be retired by 2018 but Rooney will be 32 and the Manchester United star would love to still be around to help England win the World Cup

on home soil.

"Sir Bobby Charlton is one of the legends and when he speaks about playing for England in the World Cup in front of his own fans, it's only something you can dream of," Rooney said.

"I'm sure the support from fans will drive us on and give us a good opportunity of winning it. "If that happened, I wouldn't be able to describe it. Growing up and watching England, then playing for England, it's an emotional thing and something I am really proud of."

"To win a World Cup, not just myself and my family but the whole country, would be something special."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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38 Egret's cousin
39 "You Were Meant for Me" singer
42 Catch sight of
43 Additional
44 Any time now
45 That girl
46 Cushion
47 Ginger holder
49 Reuben holder

Solution time: 25 mins.

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ASIA OBOE AGE
SPORTS BARBENUS
ASTRAT VIDEOR
JEST DUB EBIOR
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BEAU STY CREW
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ETA EGAD RUMS
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CRYPTOQUIP

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GJ SGWAZPUV GI KPV XGGJ.
AKQ MFH KZT AG SXH
"TXPIWV ZXQ GI AKQ KGFVQ!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A BUNCH OF PEOPLE COMPELLED SOMEBODY TO EAT A CERTAIN FRUIT, THAT MAY BE PEAR PRESSURE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals O