



Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova jubilates after beating Australia's Samantha Stosur in the French Open semifinal at Roland Garros in Paris on Thursday.

All-Russian final

AFP, Paris



Svetlana Kuznetsova set up an all-Russian French Open final against top seed Dina Safina...

Dina Safina hopes that a more economical run to this year's French Open final will crown her drive to win a first Grand Slam title...

The 23-year-old Russian top seed goes up against compatriot Svetlana Kuznetsova in the championship match...

Last year she arrived in the final against Serbia's Ana Ivanovic in a depleted physical state...

The result was a disappointing 6-4, 6-3 loss that left her frustrated and determined to earn a second bite at the cherry this year...

"I wouldn't say I was too nervous last year," she said after defeating Slovakia's Dominika Cibulkova 6-3, 6-3 in the semi-finals...

"It was just that I was tired overall because I had such a tough draw and so many matches I had to pull out."

"This year I've spent much less time on the court so I'm much fresher."

Also different for Safina this year will be her familiarity with her opponent.

She had played Ivanovic before their final in 2008 but the Serb was still something of an unknown quantity at that level.

Kuznetsova on the other hand she knows inside out. The two are good friends, have known each other from the time they were youngsters and played 12 times since 2001 with Safina leading their rivalry 7-5.

This year they have comfortably been the two best players in the claycourt season - Kuznetsova winning the final in Stuttgart and Safina gaining her revenge in Rome.

That loss in Germany was the only one sustained by Safina in 21 matches since she earned the world No.1 spot from Serena Williams on April 20.

But her reign has been contested, notably by the younger of the Williams siblings, due to the fact that she has yet to win a Grand Slam title.

Safina believes she is being unfairly treated.

"I think since I became No.1 I'm playing in finals and winning the titles so how much more proof do I need to give people that I think I deserve that spot."

"It would be great though if I could have a Grand Slam."

Kuznetsova, still only 23 despite having played for six years at the highest level,

recalls that in their earlier days back in Russia she was clearly second fiddle to the Muscovite Safina who had a famous brother Marat and a respected coach for a mother.

"I used to be girl from St. Petersburg, she was Moscow and her mom is huge coach who been coaching her. I mean, she was No. 1, No. 2, always great. I don't even know what number I had," she said.

That changed when they both turned professional with Kuznetsova, who moved to Spain with her parents to foster her career, breaking through early and Safina struggling to make the transition.

Now both find themselves at the top of the tree and facing off in a Grand Slam final for the first time.

It's a prospect that Kuznetsova relishes. "She's going to be for favourite to win. She's No. 1. She played an unbelievable season. She beat me last time we played in Rome," she said.

"But there are some points I can work on and think positive for myself."

"First of all, that I beat her, as I did in Stuttgart. It was indoor, but still, she can play very well in indoor."

"I have to move her around definitely but I have just to work my game."

Both players have minor injury concerns with Safina under the weather with a virus the last few days and Kuznetsova having a bad blister on her foot.

Igloo T20

SPORTS REPORTER

Golden Boys and Ekota Sporting Club have advanced to the finals of the Igloo Summer Twenty20 Cricket Challenge.

In the first semifinal Heritage Cricketers beat Golden Boys by two wickets at the Dhanmondi Cricket Ground. Heritage batted first and scored 130-9 with Taimur top scoring with 28 while Asif took 4-16.

In the second semifinal Ekota Sporting Club defeated Cricket Mentors by nine runs at the same venue. Batting first the winners made 176 for the loss of nine wickets.

The final will be played at the same venue tomorrow.

'He let us down'

AFP, London



Ricky Ponting said Andrew Symonds had "let himself down, let all his team-mates down and Cricket Australia down" after he was sent home from Australia's squad at the World Twenty20 in England.

All-rounder Symonds' exit on Thursday, which Australia captain Ponting confirmed was for an "alcohol-related incident", came just 48 hours before the team's opening Group C match against the West Indies at the Oval.

This is not the first time that Symonds' career has been blighted by off-field problems - on Australia's 2005 tour of the UK he was dropped on the morning of their shock one-day defeat against Bangladesh in Cardiff following a late night drinking session.

But whereas Ponting has often spoken up for Symonds, he deliberately avoided telling reporters at the Oval on Thursday if the 33-year-old Queensland cricketer had an international future.

"We are all a little bit disappointed with the events of the last 24 hours to tell the truth on the eve of a very big tournament for us," Ponting said.

"To lose one of our better players and better performing Twenty20 players in the world right now is far from ideal, but we have got to move on from it as quickly as possible."

Ponting said any sadness he felt at the latest indiscretion of Symonds, a hard-hitting batsman, brilliant fielder and a bowler capable of both spin and seam, went far beyond the personal.

"I don't feel any more disappointed or let down than anyone else in the team. It's a team game, the bigger picture here is about the team and the future of Australian cricket."

"That's why we've come to the decision we came to." Asked what had happened, Ponting said: "I'm not going to go into specifics. I think James Sutherland (Cricket Australia chief executive) made it pretty clear it was an alcohol-related incident."

"He (Symonds) has let himself down, let all his team-mates down and Cricket Australia down."

Ponting, who said Australia were now seeking "clarification" from the International Cricket Council as to whether they could summon a replacement in to what was now a 14-man squad, refused to speculate about Symonds' future.

"As everyone knows he's contracted until June 30 this year and we will see what happens from there."

Ponting stressed he didn't regret his previous support for Symonds.

"I don't think you'll ever see me not put my hand up and back anyone that I feel can win a game for Australia."

In the short term, the absence of Symonds - who was not selected for the Ashes series in England that follows the World Twenty20, with Shane Watson and Andrew McDonald chosen ahead of him - leaves Australia with a selection issue.

"Now we've got to find someone who can have the same impact upon a game as Andrew Symonds can," Ponting said.

"It probably throws the balance a little bit in our side but the beauty of our side is that there is a lot of flexibility within the group."

Symonds received counselling earlier this year and returned to the Australia team in the one-day series win over Pakistan in Dubai in April.

Ponting denied Symonds had been rushed back to international duty.

"I don't think so, we gave him the appropriate amount of time. Unfortunately, for him and us, he's come back in and this has happened again."

Ponting added Symonds had not broken any curfews because he considered them an irrelevance.

"There's no such thing as curfew in the Australian cricket team," Ponting said. "You don't need curfews around good teams, that's what being part of a team is all about, having respect for yourself and your team-mates."

Ponting was Australia captain when they lost leg-spin great Shane Warne to a drugs ban on the eve of the 2003 World Cup in South Africa which the team won without losing a match.

"I've been there before, I know how to handle it," said Ponting. "It's about the next guy in line coming in and putting his hand up when required and making a name and identity for himself at international level."

Netherlands

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89 without loss at the half-way mark, only managed 73 in the final 10 overs during an innings without a single six.

Bopara got England off to an ideal start by carving the first ball of the innings from left-arm quick Dirk Nannes, who has played at Lord's for Middlesex, for four before square driving him to the boundary later that over.

The duo shared a century stand in 71 balls before Bopara, in sight of his fifty, gave his Essex teammate ten Doeschate a wicket when he holed out to Pieter Seelaar at long-on.

Bopara's runs had come in 36 balls with seven fours. Wright though did get to his fifty, off 37 balls with five fours.

The Netherlands turned 102 for one into 113 for two when Owais Shah went cheaply but Wright, giving himself room outside leg-stump, played Nannes through the offside for four.

But Eoin Morgan, like Shah playing on his Middlesex home ground, also fell cheaply when he reverse-swept Peter Borren straight to Bas Zuiderent and England were eroding their fine start.

Wright then holed out to give paceman ten Doeschate a second wicket, his exit bringing in Robert Key, a late replacement for Kevin Pietersen, who was ruled out by a recurrence of an Achilles injury.

Netherlands had a shaky start losing two early wickets for just 23 runs in the third over but a quickfire 49 off 30 balls by TN de Grooth and PW Borren (30) brought the Dutchmen closer to history. With seven required off the last over and two relatively new batsmen at the crease the match was evenly poised for an exciting finish. But it was the consistent running between the wickets by DLS van Bunge and E Schiferli who took Netherlands to victory by four wickets in the last ball.

Kiwis staying under radar

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New Zealand though are vulnerable to top order collapse - as happened in their warm-up loss to Australia - but on the flip side they do bat a long way down with reserve keeper Peter McGlashan making an impressive 49 as a No 7 against Ricky Ponting's men.

Of all the three Associate or junior nations taking part in this tournament (Ireland and the Netherlands are the other two), Scotland look least equipped to cause an upset.

It is now a decade since their captain Gavin Hamilton won his one and only Test cap for England while the squad suffered disruption during the warm-up series when former county bowler John Blain quit after a row with his skipper.

Having failed to qualify for the 2011 World Cup in Asia, a major blow to their morale, Scotland will be desperate to show in some way that they are deserving of a place on the big stage.

But a seven-wicket loss to the Netherlands in a warm-up confirmed the extent of the challenge facing Hamilton's men who, a day earlier, had threatened to embarrass England before Kevin Pietersen took that match away from them.

"We wanted to play decent cricket but we were miles off the mark," said Hamilton of the Dutch defeat.

"There's no excuse whatsoever for what was a lacklustre performance. The disappointing thing was that we made the same mistakes - there were far too many dot balls."

Probable teams and officials for the Group D ICC World Twenty20 match between New Zealand and Scotland at the Oval on Saturday:

SQUADS NEW ZEALAND (from): Daniel Vettori (capt), Neil Broom, Ian Butler, Brendon Dlamini, James Franklin, Martin Guppitt, Brendon McCullum (wkt), Nathan McCullum, Peter McGlashan, Kyle Mills, Iain O'Brien, Jacob Oram, Jesse Ryder, Scott Styris, Ross Taylor SCOTLAND (from): Gavin Hamilton (capt), Richie Berrington, Calum MacLeod, Kyle Coetzer, Gordon Drummond, Majid Haq, Neil McCullum, Dewald Nel, Navdeep Poonia, Glenn Rogers, Colin Smith (wkt), Jan Stander, Ryan Watson, Fraser Watts, Craig Wright Umpires: Daryl Harper (AUS) and Billy Doctrove (WIS) TV umpire: Rudi Koertzen (RSA)

White steps in for Symonds

AFP, London

Big-hitting middle order batsman Cameron White was on Thursday called up by Australia to replace the disgraced Andrew Symonds for the World Twenty20 which gets underway on Friday.

The 25-year-old Victorian, who was surprisingly left out of the original squad, was the obvious replacement after Symonds was sent home for what Australia captain Ricky Ponting described as an "alcohol-related incident".

White has played seven Twenty20 internationals, scoring a total of 152 runs with a highest score of 40 not out.

Symonds' exit came just 48 hours before Australia's opening Group C match against the West Indies at the Oval.

Rain spoils

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played in England.

With a huge cover remaining resolutely in place over the pitch, while volunteers struggled to control giant England and Netherlands flags on the outfield, a temporary stage in front of the pavilion from which the singer Alesha Dixon had been due to perform, was hastily dismantled.

"Unfortunately, the opening ceremony has been canned," an International Cricket Council spokesman told reporters in the Lord's media centre. "But we will have a couple of speeches."

Tigers sniff a chance

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them under pressure and hopefully come out on top. We are going into the match to win it. If we do that then the Ireland match will be like a bonus practice match for us."

The coach also felt that despite the relative youth of the side it was still an experienced unit and India would not want to wait and find out about the players.

"Most of the boys have been around for around 12-15 months now so inexperience is not an excuse for them. The fact that we have not played India that often might raise the question of surprises but there are visions and footages available and I'm sure they'll (India) do their homework. Our boys are ready to play and it is time for them to step up."

Siddons said the team was shaping up well and no longer happy with one-off wins.

"I have always said that I don't want us to have that reputation because I will call it a fluke if we win one game out of 40-50. I don't think this team is about flukes any more. They

have done the work. We have really good depth in batting and bowling now. Two of our main bowlers are in our top six in the batting line up. That's a bonus for us and not too many sides can say that. I think we have moved on from that fluky win and we have a chance of pushing anyone. We showed that in the practice matches. Against Australia we didn't quite bowl that well because we were caught on the hop but then we batted really well and against Sri Lanka we played well also. We have moved on but the other teams are rated higher than us and are probably better teams on their day at the moment and are more consistent than us but if they slip up then we are happy to jump all over them."

Ashraf said he the practice games have given the players confidence and the spirit was up. "We ran top sides like New Zealand, Australia and Sri Lanka very close in the warm-ups and if we hadn't made small mistakes here and there then we would have won all three. The boys are really pumped up for tomorrow's game. Everyone is

fit and raring to go."

The skipper was also banking on his deputy Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to put up a special show which would inspire the team.

"Mashrafe has always done well against India and has won us matches against them. He has been our best player against India both with the bat and ball. Our team has always found that something extra while facing India."

Ashraf said the spirit in the side reminded him of the mood prior to the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies when the Tigers knocked India out of the competition.

"I remember that each and everyone in the team believed that we could beat them and we did. I could feel that energy before the match and even when we were warming up at Port of Spain. We will give it our best shot tomorrow knowing that in this form of the game anyone can beat the other."

The Tigers have decided to wait till the team meeting today morning to finalise the XI against India.

Roy runs out of credit

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"weak" handling of him.

"Andrew Symonds was a player never humble enough to learn from his mistakes, governed by weak officials who let him get away with far too much for far too long," Robert Craddock said in The Daily Telegraph.

"He is a boofthead. They are weak as water. It really is that simple."

"Cricket Australia chief executive James Sutherland told Symonds when he acted

up in England four years ago that he would have his contract torn up if he ever acted up again. Yet he did -- at least four times -- and until now his contract remained intact." The national selectors and some psychologists who have been peddling lines about his alleged recovery (from alcoholism) so ridiculous that they would be laughable if they weren't so sad."

The Australian's Peter Lalor said CA officials were at fault for continually taking the soft

option with Symonds.

"The hard option was not taken and now Symonds's Australian career is over because of a series of minor misdemeanours," he said.

Sutherland said he had no regrets over how his organisation had managed the Symonds situation.

"It is a constant balancing act and it just tipped too far. This is the final straw. I am not going to shy away from the process we have been through," he said.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP FQYYUFK X YTM TF WXOTPM TVF NXZ XELUFF VRK FVLKKV NUQAJ ZUQ EAXTW ZUQ FXN X YULO TP VRK LUXJ? Saturday's Cryptoquip: EVER SINCE THE FALCON BUILT A LOFTIER MOUNTAIN NEST, I SUPPOSE IT'S BEEN LIVING THE HIGH LIFE. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals I



Did U Know?

The basketball became an official Olympic event at the Summer Games in Berlin, Germany in 1936.