

Women born again

AFP, New York



Boring? Predictable? Women's tennis has been written off as a spectacle in recent times, but the US Open has proved otherwise.

While the men's tournament stuck mainly to the script, the women's singles was a roller-coaster of upsets, incidents and talking points.

Kim Clijsters topped the bill winning her second title at Flushing Meadows, just five weeks after ending a 27-month long retirement during which time she married and had a baby girl.

But there were other strong story lines.

Serena Williams's blowing a fuse after being foot-faulted in her semi-final against Clijsters and taking out her frustrations on the lineswoman who sanctioned her with a profane rant.

Teenager Melanie Oudin's stirring run into the quarter-finals cutting down Russian seeds along the way.

China's Li Na and Italy's Flavia Pennetta showing that sheer hard work, experience and guile still have a place in the sport.

It all added up to the best women's Grand Slam tournament in years.

Clijsters, having left the sport in May, 2007, when she and compatriot Justine Henin along with the Williams sisters and Maria Sharapova were head and shoulders

above the rest, is well-placed to judge the changes.

"I definitely think that there's a different type of tennis out there that's being played, and I think the Open has been really interesting this year just because it's been so unpredictable," she said after her straight sets win in the final here over 19-year-old Caroline Wozniacki, another star in the making.

"I remember a few years ago when Justine and I were playing each other again or when the Williams sisters were playing each other again, people were kind of complaining because it was everything repeating itself.

"So I think it's a good thing, because there are so many new players out there who have a great talent, and a lot of young girls, as well.

"On any good day they can beat a lot of top players and a lot of players who have been in the top 10 now for a few years.

"I don't think women's tennis has anything to worry about.

The revival is crucial for the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), which governs the women's game, coming as it does at a time when all sports are struggling to keep their sponsors in the face of the global economic recession.

Newly-appointed WTA chairman Stacey Allaster is upbeat saying that the circuit to date has lost only one sponsor in 2009 while three new tournaments have been added for 2010 in Copenhagen, Kuala Lumpur and San Diego.

"Our players are delivering, the fans and sponsors, and what a time for it to come particularly during these tough economic times," Allaster said at the US Open.

"The bottom line is we want to be a credible product, consistently delivering to fans and sponsors and in 2009 our athletes have done that."

Allaster added that the focus will be on "fan growth," especially in non-traditional markets in Asia and South America.

"We need a younger fan base to have sustainable sponsorship revenues and we need fan growth in key strategic markets," she said.

"That's why China is an incredibly important strategic priority for us and I think we do need to look at other markets where we might not have events.

"But it doesn't mean we can't build a brand presence in markets like India and/or Brazil, which are key for the long-term growth of this business.

"When we sit with a global sponsor, they say, 'We want Russia, we want Brazil, we want India, we want Europe and we want the United States.' So we have to adapt."

The 2009 US Open will certainly have helped the product and 2010 looks promising with Clijsters sure to be a huge draw in Australia at the start of the year, Sharapova hoping to be back at full fitness and even a possible return of former world No. 1 Justine Henin.

Serena apologizes

AFP, New York

Serena Williams apologized Monday for the abusive and threatening tirade she launched at a line judge in a semifinal loss to Kim Clijsters at the US Open on Saturday.

One day after issuing a statement in which she pointedly did not offer apologies to the line judge, the 11-time Grand Slam champion offered up an amendment to her comments with another statement, this one an apology to many.

"I want to amend my press statement of yesterday and want to make it clear as possible -- I want to sincerely apologize first to the lineswoman, Kim Clijsters, the US Tennis Association and mostly tennis fans everywhere for my inappropriate outburst," Williams said.

"I'm a woman of great pride, faith and integrity and I admit when I'm wrong. I need to make it clear to all young people that I handled myself inappropriately and it's not the way to act -- win or lose, good call or bad call in any sport, in any manner.

"I like to lead by example. We all learn from experiences both good and bad. I will learn and grow from this, and be a better person as a result."

One of his

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have always tried to win but we have been able to produce results in the last couple of years or so. We have been able to perform pretty consistently. There are going to be upsets in between but if you look at the larger picture, we have had better days."

India's victory was only their fourth in ODI finals in 21 attempts since 2000, and their first trophy in Sri Lanka since 1998. MS Dhoni played his part in setting up the win with a brisk 56 after promoting himself to No. 3. "The victory is special," Dhoni said. "It feels great to win a trophy in Sri Lanka after such a long time. Being the second-placed team in world rankings we have to keep performing well to sustain the quality."

Despite the big total, India had to endure some anxious moments as Sri Lanka's batsmen battled hard till the end (Tendulkar said he had "no nails left" after the match saw-sawed its way to the finish). The home side were helped by some tardy Indian fielding; two catches were grassed and several run-out chances were missed. The fast bowlers were also off the boil early on, wilting in the face of an onslaught from the Sri Lankan openers. "We have got to learn from our mistakes," Dhoni said. "We did lack a bit in the fielding and bowling departments and both are very crucial. Thankfully, we ended on the winning side today."

Dhoni dedicated the win to the former BCCI president, Raj Singh Dungarpur, who died on Saturday. "He was the manager during our tour to Pakistan (in 2005-06). He was a great man. We dedicate the victory to him."

India's next assignment is the Champions Trophy, which kicks off on September 22 in South Africa.

Alam trashes age flak

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket team coach Intikhab Alam on Tuesday brushed aside "negative" criticism from those demanding his removal because of his age, saying the campaign was motivated by jealousy.

The 67-year-old guided Pakistan to the World Twenty20 title in England in June but Tests and one-day defeats on the Sri Lanka tour last month prompted former players to brand his old age a hindrance in proper coaching.

But Alam brushed aside the flak. "If there is healthy criticism I take it in a positive way, but targeting my age is negative thinking and I smell jealousy from this," said Alam on the sidelines of Pakistan team's training camp here.

The five-day camp is the final phase of Pakistan's preparations for the elite eight-nation Champions Trophy to be played in South Africa from September 22-October 5.

Alam said the same people who were pointing finger at his age were praising him a few months ago.

"I feel sorry for such people who have a personal vendetta against me," said Alam, who was also credited for Pakistan's success in the 50-over World Cup in Australia in 1992. "They cannot digest our T20 success."

Former captain Aamir Sohail last week criticised Alam for being too old to handle coaching at international level.

Former Pakistan Cricket Board chief Tauqir

Zia also joined Sohail in targeting Alam's age, saying Pakistan needs a young coach to guide them to more successes.

Alam, however, insists he is fit.

"I even take part in coaching drills and my age has never been a hindrance in my work. Coaching is all about experience and football coaches worldwide are over 70 years of age but no one speaks against them," said Alam.

Alam said he feels no pressure and is committed to his task -- to help Pakistan attain top spot in world cricket.

"My work speaks for itself and after winning the World Twenty20 we squandered winning positions in Sri Lanka and lost," said Alam, who played 47 Tests and four one-day internationals and also captained Pakistan.

"One defeat doesn't mean we are a bad team, we are a good team and if we play to our potential we can win more events in future and our first target is the Champions Trophy."

Pakistan is placed in Group A of the Trophy. They play the West Indies on September 23, India (September 26) and Australia (September 30).

England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and hosts South Africa form Group B. The top two teams will qualify for the final.

Alam said Pakistan's first target will be to reach the semi-final.

"We have trained hard and after two warm-up matches before the tournament starts we will be in good shape for the event. Our first target will be to reach the semi-final and then aim for the Trophy."

The Pakistan team flies out to Johannesburg on Thursday.

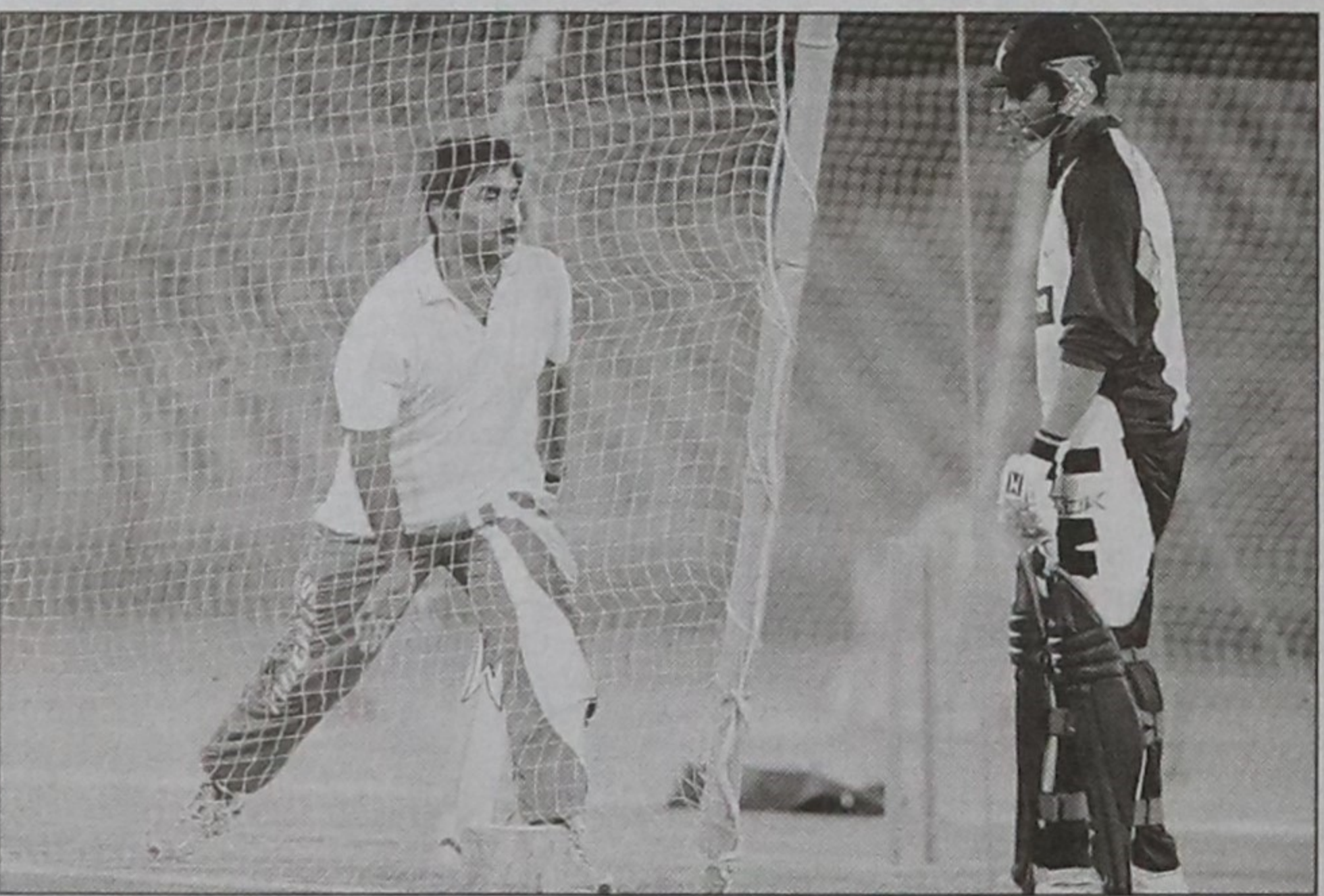


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan batting adviser Javed Miandad (L) gives some tips to Shoaib Malik during a training session at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi on Monday.

Federer looks forward

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"That's the way it goes sometimes.

"But the year has been amazing already and it's not over yet. Got married and had kids, don't know how much more I want."

Still, the manner of Federer's defeat came as a surprise as, in contrast to the French Open where he struggled all the way, the Swiss star had looked imperious throughout the fortnight.

The wins in Paris and London appeared to have lifted a weight off his shoulders and he was once again playing with the flair and panache that marked his game in 2006 and 2007, when he won three out of the four Grand Slam titles in each year.

What changed between his impressive semifinal demolition of Novak Djokovic and his loss to Juan Martin del Potro, a player seven years his junior, was hard to decipher for Federer.

He said that his new responsibilities as a father and the travel complications of moving them and his wife over from Switzerland to North America for the hardcourt season had not posed a problem.

Neither had del Potro's play

been that different from previous meetings between the two although Federer did concede that the Argentine was "rock solid".

But he did admit that he had finished the tournament and the year's last Grand Slam in dire need of a good rest.

"I'm tired. Sometimes they [majors] hit you more than other ones," he said.

"Maybe here with the whole music thing, it's maybe different.

"I don't get hit emotionally as bad maybe in Wimbledon and Australia where it becomes super quiet at the end of the games and you have a lot of things going through your mind.

Next up, he said, would be a long rest period followed by getting prepared for the Masters events in Madrid and Paris followed by the season-ending ATP World Tour Finals which will be held for the first time at London in November.

"Next year, I have sort of a plan in place obviously," he added.

"I only look more or less to Australia, and after that, I don't know."

Rain puts

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Federation Cup may resume after the vacation," said BFF general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi.

Sadi said that they had no option but to postpone the matches and the condition of the ground would be worse if they continued the tournament based on the weather forecast.

He, however, said that they would level the ground in their own initiatives during the postponement of the tournament as the 3rd B. League would also be played in the same ground in October.

Shakib

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Ryder (NZL), Peter Siddle

(AUS). ASSOCIATE AND AFFILIATE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (non-Test nations): Rizwan Cheema (CAN), Ryan ten Doeschate (NED), William Porterfield (IRL), Edgar Schiffrli (NED).

WOMEN'S CRICKETER OF THE YEAR: Charlotte Edwards (ENG), Shelley Nitschke (AUS), Claire Taylor (ENG).

UMPIRE OF THE YEAR: Aleem Dar (PAK), Tony Hill (NZL), Asad Rauf (PAK), Simon Taufel (AUS).

SPIRIT OF CRICKET AWARD: Australia, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka.



PHOTO: STAR

New president of the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) General Abdul Mubeen (R) watches the facilities at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Tuesday as part of the build up for the upcoming SA Games.

BCF election demanded by Sept

SPORTS REPORTER

Four members of the newly formed ad-hoc committee of the Bangladesh Chess Federation (BCF) said yesterday that they were included on the committee without their consent.

But since they have been made members of the new body, they -- Dr AR Khan, Khandokar Kayes Hasan, Monzur Hossain Zimmu and Mushfiqur Rahman -- accepted to work with the committee if the government announced an election date before the end of September.

The four organised a press conference yesterday at the National Press Club where they also warned if anything otherwise happened, they would step down from the committee. They thought such process (appointment of the ad-hoc committee) was not right.

"With due respect to the sports minister and the National Sports Council, we have decided to stay on the committee until September 30 if the government announces the election date and completes it by October. Otherwise, we all four will step down," said AR Khan, a former general secretary of the federation.

Meanwhile, leading chess players including Grand Masters Reefat Bin Sattar and Abdullah Al Rakib gave their 'no-confidence' to the ad-hoc committee, led by general secretary Mokaddes Hossain.

Athletes hold

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Dipu, also deputy general secretary of Bangladesh Olympic Association, said an extension work at the Krija Palli has been going on and it ultimately made the toilets unfit for use.

The BOA and NSC has been ensuring time and again to provide all facilities for the athletes to bring better results in the SA Games at home and the incident at Krija Palli was not the first time as the hockey players had earlier boycotted the training camp citing the low standard food and poor conditions of the accommodation as well as toilet facilities.

Tandil erupts

INTERNET, undated



Juan Martin del Potro's US Open final victory has sent

shockwaves of delight through his native Tandil, a modest rural city which has become an unlikely production line for Argentine professionals.

At Club Independiente, where del Potro began playing at the age of six, hundreds of people followed Monday's triumph over Swiss world number one Roger Federer on a large screen television.

Among them was del Potro's childhood coach, Marcelo Gomez, who has trained five other professional men's players from Tandil.

"Juan Martin has just made history in Argentine tennis," an emotional Gomez said after the victory.

"At the age of 20, he beats number one ranked Federer to win the US Open. I don't think he understands the magnitude of what he's just accomplished."

Gomez also coached

Mariano Zabaleta, Diego

Junqueira, Maximo Gonzalez and Juan Monaco, who all hail from the city of 100,000, located 350-km south of Buenos Aires.

Tandil ground to a halt for four hours as a majority of its residents watched their local hero overcome some early jitters before fighting back to beat five-times US Open champion Federer 3-6 7-6 4-6 7-6 2 to lift his first major title.

Once del Potro had completed the victory, celebrations carried on through the night at Club Independiente.

"I saw del Potro play as a young boy," club president Pedro Gomez said among a raucous crowd celebrating the triumph.

"I'm enormously happy -- to be able to enjoy this victory is amazing."

Del Potro became the second Argentine to win the US men's crown, joining compatriot Guillermo Vilas, who won on clay in 1977 and attended Monday's final in the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"We have a work method in Tandil," Marcelo Gomez added.

Veni, vidi, vici for Del Potro

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But it was uncharacteristic, much like Federer's noncommittal fifth set. He lost a break early, fell down 3-0, and it was a matter of playing out the string.

"I thought he served twice, held twice; I got broken; then he got the 3-0 lead. Pretty obvious," Federer said, not bothering to expand.

His empty stare at the end was much different than the tear-filled reaction at the Australian to start the year, when he lost to Nadal in five sets and was left still seeking Grand Slam title No. 14 to tie Pete Sampras for the record.

Federer got that at the French Open, then broke the record at Wimbledon.

Got married and became the father of twins, too.

"I think this is easy to get over just because I've had the most amazing summer," he

said. "I tried everything, you know. Didn't work. I missed chances. He played well and in the end it was a tough fifth set. It's acceptable. But life goes on. No problem."

Life should change now for del Potro, who joined Guillermo Vilas as the second Argentine to win the Open. Vilas, the 1977 champion, was on hand to watch his countryman, who will move up to No. 5 in the rankings and now has signature wins under his belt.

Del Potro beat Nadal and Federer on back-to-back days -- how many people can say that? -- and got stronger as the matches went on. That's unlike his meeting with Federer earlier this year in the French semifinals, when he held a 2-sets-to-1 lead but let it slip. This time, he came back from down 2-1, two points away from losing the match.

"I think, okay, you never

lose until the last point, so keep fighting," he said. "The crowd helped me, and they saw my fight in every point."

When the fight ended after 4 hours, 6 minutes, del Potro fell to the ground, spread eagle, and put his hands over his face. Later, he was weeping.

"I think the first major is always a big deal," Federer said. "Best feeling on the planet after all the hard work you put in. It was good to see him being so happy and emotional about it."

About an hour after the match, del Potro conceded he hadn't processed the whole thing, didn't know what to do with the car they gave him, the trophy he kissed, the 1.85 million dollars he won.

"Maybe cheesecake for my birthday," he said.

Not bad for starters.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

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4 quartet

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PEA GAM

CLAN LAMER

ALERT AZORES

PUBLIC SERVANT

TEE QUEST MOON

BURN LEON

LURED SMART

TAPA BLAB

SIT COLIC ADO

PRIVATEDANGER

SCATHE QATAR

KNEED UPON

ERR EER

54 Actress

Myrna

55 Coaster

11 Roscoe

19 Part of

UCLA

21 Branch

23 Swindle

24 Trawler

gear

25 Big

bothers

26 Stylish

27 Head