

Younus played through pain

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan captain Younus Khan has admitted that despite not being fully fit, he decided to play in the ICC Champions Trophy semifinal, which they lost by five wickets to New Zealand in Johannesburg.

"It was difficult for me. I was in some pain. I had told the team management that I was not fully fit because of the injury. But because of the importance of the tournament, I decided to play as didn't want to miss the trophy," Younus said.

Pakistan was defeated by New Zealand in the semifinal last night with Younus dropping a crucial catch to give a life to top scorer Elliot in New Zealand's run chase.

Younus picked up a hair-line fracture in his right hand little finger while playing a warm-up match against Sri Lanka before the tournament. He played in the eight-nation event with the fracture, although some former cricketers questioned his decision to ignore the injury.

Even India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, before the game against Pakistan had noted that it was risky for anyone to play with a fracture. Younus said he had spoken to the team management about his injury and whether it would be right for him to continue playing.

Fun-loving Djokovic

AFP, Beijing

Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic, whose comic impressions of other players on the men's and women's tours became huge hits on YouTube, says clowning around is his way to give back to the fans.

Djokovic, who famously spoofed Maria Sharapova and Rafael Nadal in 2007, said he never knows when the urge might strike to parody another colleague.

"I don't plan to do anything, what I do. It just comes spontaneously, I guess, on the court," Djokovic told reporters at the China Open, where he is the number two seed.

"If it's the right moment, and the people are really eager to see something, then maybe I'll show something."

Djokovic and tennis legend John McEnroe had a mimicking moment at the US Open last month, doing impressions of each other, with the 22-year-old Serb pacing the baseline and hurling his racket to the ground, Johnny Mac-style.

"I like to have fun on and off the court," said Djokovic, who won bronze at last year's Beijing Olympics.

"When I need to be professional on the court and get the job done, that's what I try to do. Before and after the match, I like to enjoy, I like to bring some positive energy to the spectators."

Hockey

FROM PAGE 17 Cup and the Premier League," said Anvir.

The transfer was earlier scheduled for July, but it was deferred by two months due to the commitments of the top hockey players in the German Hockey League.

The national youth team are also scheduled to travel to Myanmar in November while a BKSP team are scheduled to take part in Nehru Cup in India at the same time, but the club officials want all top players to be available for the transfer.

Sonali Bank have already ensured most of their targeted players while others club have yet to confirm their players. It was learnt that Abahani have confirmed 13 players from Bangladesh. Krira Shikkha Protisthan. This season each club will be eligible to field five foreign players in a match.



Did U Know?

Tennis was played at the Olympics until 1924, then reinstated in 1988.



PHOTO: AFP

OH NO! World number one and top seed Dinara Safina of Russia is in agony after losing a point against Zhang Shuai of China at the China Open in Beijing yesterday.

Safina, Venus out

Tennis

AFP, Beijing

Top seed Dinara Safina imploded at the China Open on Monday, losing to an unheralded Chinese player and clearing the way for Serena Williams to reclaim the world number one ranking from the Russian.

Third seed Venus Williams also crashed out of the tournament, losing for the second week in a row to talented Russian teen Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, leaving the women's draw in Beijing in disarray.

On the men's side, Serbia's Novak Djokovic, the number two seed, dropped his serve once early against Romania's Victor Hanesu but worked out his jitters to take the match in straight sets, 6-3, 7-5.

China's Zhang Shuai, just 20 years old and ranked 226th in the world, thrilled the partisan crowd on centre court at the Olympic tennis venue by pulling off the second-round win over the raven-haired Safina, 7-5, 7-6 (7/5).

Safina -- who also lost early in Tokyo last week to a Taiwanese teenage qualifier -- struggled with her serve throughout the match, with a total of 13 double-faults.

After dropping the first set, the 23-year-old Russian -- slamming balls and screaming in frustration -- could not settle down in the second, repeatedly failing to consolidate her breaks of Zhang's serve by surrendering her own.

Zhang served for the match at 5-4 but the Russian battled back to 5-5 and then into a tiebreak. The Chinese player won the battle of wills, closing it out with a winner down the line, to the roar of the crowd.

Serena Williams, the second seed here, needs only to have a better result than Safina to claim the number one ranking, according to

the WTA. She will face Russia's Ekaterina Makarova in the second round.

As for Venus, she was looking to avenge her loss to Pavlyuchenkova at last week's Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo, but she never found her rhythm against the 18-year-old Russian, who won the second-round match 3-6, 6-1, 6-4.

"She played really well and unfortunately sometimes I made an error too soon," a dejected Williams told reporters immediately after the match at a brief press conference.

The 29-year-old American eked out the first set, but Pavlyuchenkova, ranked 39 in the world, remained undaunted, breaking Williams to go up 3-1 in the second set and cruising to force the third-set decider.

She again broke Williams in the first game of the third set and started to dictate play, with the seven-time Grand Slam winner failing to find her range, spraying ground strokes both into the net and beyond the baseline.

The Russian, serving for the match at 5-2, battled her nerves, double faulting to lose the game at love. Williams held her serve, but Pavlyuchenkova steadied herself to seal the win with a forehand winner.

Men's world number four Djokovic earned some easy points with 10 aces in his win over Hanesu, the world number 27, but said he hoped to find a better rhythm before his next match.

In other first-round ATP action, Germany's Philipp Kohlschreiber defeated Ivo Karlovic 7-6 (8/6), 4-6, 6-1, despite the big-serving Croat's 27 aces. France's Julien Benneteau advanced, beating Brazil's Marcos Daniel 6-3, 6-4.

Top seed Rafael Nadal was to play Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus on Tuesday.

On the women's side of the draw, sixth seed Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia easily advanced into the round of 16, beating Spain's Anabel Medina Garrigues, 6-2, 6-1.

Monfils, Wawrinka win

Tennis

AFP, Tokyo

Former world junior number one Gael Monfils fired down 15 aces in two sets to beat Marsel Ilhan of Turkey in the first round at the Japan Open tennis tournament on Monday.

The French fourth seed, playing in Tokyo for the first time, got off to a flying start with a three consecutive aces in the opening game before scoring a 6-2, 6-4 victory.

Earlier in the day, Beijing Olympic doubles gold medallist Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland also made a winning debut beating American serve-and-volleyer John Isner 6-4, 6-4.

Monfils pulled off an early break forcing Ilhan to mis-fire an approach shot in the second game and never looked back afterward breaking the Turk in the last game of the both sets to finish off the 66-minute match.

"I served great. I tried to focus on my serve, because it's a little bit fast condition. I think I played right today. I didn't know what Ilhan is going to do, so I had to keep myself stronger to

win in two sets," Monfils said.

After world number one Roger Federer and Britain's Andy Murray withdrew with injuries, Monfils sees "a big chance" to win the 1.2 million dollar event here.

"Even if Roger and Andy were here, it's the same. I can compete against them and win," said Monfils, ranked 13th.

"I'm pretty confident. I just have to take care of my fatigue, because of all those travels I had in these few weeks. But I'm playing great. I'm in good shape. I have a big chance to win," he added.

Wawrinka missed two break points in the third game of the first set, but fired a back-handed passing shot to take an advantage in the fifth, which he won as the American hit a forehand into the net, before taking the set.

Isner, world ranked 43rd against Wawrinka's 23rd, had a break chance in the sixth game of the second set, only to see the Swiss unleash an unstoppable smash at the net.

In the second round, Wawrinka will play Simon Greul of Germany, winner over Martin Vassallo Arguello of Argentina 4-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Monfils will take on Marco Chiudinelli of Switzerland, who came back from behind to beat Dudi Sela of Israel 4-6, 6-1, 6-4.

A glorious 10 years

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona captain Carles Puyol celebrated a glorious 10 years of service with the Spanish giants as the European champions beat Almeria 1-0, lapping up the plaudits from team-mates and his coach.

Puyol, 31, could not have envisaged such a distinguished career when he made his debut back on October 2, 1999 in a 2-0 league win over Valladolid.

Since then Puyol has played 449 official games for Barcelona lifting three league titles (2005, 2006, 2009) and two Champions League titles (2006, 2009) as captain.

"To have played for so many years with Barca and to have won so many trophies is a dream," said Puyol. "I hope to win a lot more and to continue giving everything to the team, just like I have since day one."

Puyol, a Euro 2008 winner with Spain, has led by example since Frank Rijkaard appointed him captain in 2004 and has stood the test of time with few injuries and a strict training regime affording him such a long career.

"We have lived through times that have not

been as good as they are now, but he has always been there to support his team-mates and is always trying to raise their morale," said goalkeeper Victor Valdes.

"He is an example when it comes to diet and fitness because he takes care of the details of looking after himself.

"He has some very good habits because despite being 31 he never has dropped his level of play."

Gerard Pique said Puyol had helped him to improve and saluted the leadership qualities of his defensive partner.

"I am proud to have him as my captain because he always deserves to wear the armband," said Pique.

"He helps me a lot and knows exactly what his role is and how the team works so he guides the defence."

Puyol's future is currently up in the air as he ponders a contract offer from Barcelona who want him to stay on despite signing Ukraine international centre-back Dmitry Chirginsky for 25 million euros in the summer.

Coach Pep Guardiola wants Puyol to end his days with the club but accepts it is a difficult decision to make.

"I want to pay my congratulations to Carles because it is not easy to be with a club of this size for so long," said Guardiola.

Ponting praises ICC's efforts

INTERNET, undated

On the eve of the ICC Champions Trophy 2009, Australian captain Ricky Ponting expressed deep satisfaction for playing in ICC Champions Trophy.

"I think it's been an excellent tournament. It's been very rushed for us, and England, coming in as late as we did. But this has certainly been the best and most enjoyable ICC Champions Trophy that I've played in," opined Ricky Ponting.

Further he added, "To have the best eight teams, over a shorter period of time...people in this country and all over the world have enjoyed the One-day cricket played over the last couple of weeks. These events are about showcasing the game, and I think the ICC and the players have done a terrific job of making this tournament a spectacle for the 50-over game."

Ponting also expressed his opinion about making 50-over cricket more interesting.

He said, "The key issues with the 50-over game come down to the way teams want to play it. The middle overs have been what the administrators have been worried about. Bringing powerplays into the game has added a different dimension to it. If you want to play the game as best you can, as a batting side, you have to maximize those middle overs. If you do that, you'll make good scores. The more attractive the players can make the game, the more the fans will enjoy it as well," said Ricky.

Australia fined for slow going

AFP, Johannesburg

Australia have been financially punished for a slow rate when defeating England by nine wickets last Friday in an ICC Champions Trophy semifinal at Centurion.

An International Cricket Council (ICC) statement said skipper Ricky Ponting has been fined 20 per cent of his match fee and his teammates 10 per cent each for falling two overs short of the target.

The title holders are the second team after Sri Lanka to fall foul of this section of the council code of conduct with players fined five per cent and skippers 10 for every over not bowled in the allotted time.

Belgian keeper retires

AFP, Brussels

Belgium goalkeeper Stijn Stijnen has retired from international football after new coach Dick Advocaat said he was no longer number one.

Stijnen, 28, called a press conference to announce his retirement which he said was due to "the bad mentality" around the team.

The FC Bruges stopper was capped 30 times and had been a regular since May 2006.

Advocaat, who took over on September 22, said last week that Stijnen was no longer "the absolute number one" but he had included him in the squad for World Cup qualifiers against Turkey on October 10 and Estonia four days later.

Injuries cost India: Anil

ANI, Bangalore



Former Indian captain Anil Kumble on Sunday said that absence of key players in the Indian team cost them a major tournament like ICC Champions Trophy.

Talking to media persons at a promotional event here, Kumble said that in spite of keeping bench players around, India lacked key players who were not fit enough to play ICC Champions Trophy, in South Africa.

"India was a bit unfortunate with injuries that we have had in the last couple of months. Zaheer Khan and Virender Sehwag were not a part of the ICC Champions Trophy. But then injury to Yuvraj Singh didn't help either. So when you have a major tournament you want your key players to be 100 per cent. But just because you have bench strength you need not rotate you players. Every game is important and every tournament is equally important," he said.

India had lost explosive opener Virender Sehwag and pace bowler Zaheer Khan to injury before the ICC Champions Trophy began on September 23.

Yuvraj Singh, the aggressive left-hander, also suffered the injury during a fielding session in Johannesburg ruling him out of the tournament as well.

Kumble, who will lead the Royal Challengers Bangalore squad in the Champions League commencing on October 8, is aiming at gaining some match-practice ahead of the key tournament.

"We have been working hard and have grouped well," he said.

The October 8-23 event involves 12 teams, three from hosts India, two each from Australia, England and South Africa and one each from New Zealand, West Indies and Sri Lanka.

Lorenzo hot on Rossi's heels

AFP, Estoril



Spain's Jorge Lorenzo, riding a Yamaha, moved to within 18 points of MotoGP championship leader Valentino Rossi after winning the Portuguese Grand Prix here on Sunday.

Australian Casey Stoner and another Spaniard, Dani Pedrosa, finished second and third respectively.

Lorenzo's fourth win of the season, which repeated his maiden career win in the elite class in 2008, means he has closed the gap to Rossi, his teammate at Yamaha, with just three races left.

Lorenzo overcame the early surges of Pedrosa to take control of the race on the first lap and went on to lead almost from start to finish, with Rossi coming in fourth.

He finished 6.3sec ahead of Stoner and 10sec in front of Pedrosa with Rossi a huge 23.4sec behind.

"I didn't expect to win with such a gap. It was a perfect weekend as we dominated in practice, feeling great on the bike and also in the race I think it was one of the best performances in my life," said Lorenzo.

"At the beginning it was a little bit difficult to open a big gap because I could only do it one tenth of a second at a time, but then Casey's

rhythm dropped and I was able to maintain my pace."

On his title chances, he added: "It will still be very difficult but now we can say that it is not impossible. I think I can take a few risks because I don't have anything to lose. Valentino has to win the championship and we just have to keep trying."

Stoner, the 2007 world champion, back on the track after missing three races because of a mystery virus, kept Lorenzo's Yamaha within his sights and the Australian did well to hold on for a deserved runner-up place.

Eight-time world champion Rossi is likely to consider his ride a failure having managed to finish on the podium here in all nine of his previous visits to Estoril.

"It was a very difficult race," admitted a downbeat Rossi.

"I was never able to be fast because I did not have enough grip in the rear and our tyre did not work well, but I think it was more a problem of setting. After a few laps I was in great difficulties and I immediately understood that this was not going to be our race."

"I thought I'd be able to at least stay with Casey Stoner and Dani Pedrosa, but they made another step forward for the race and then there was no chance for me."

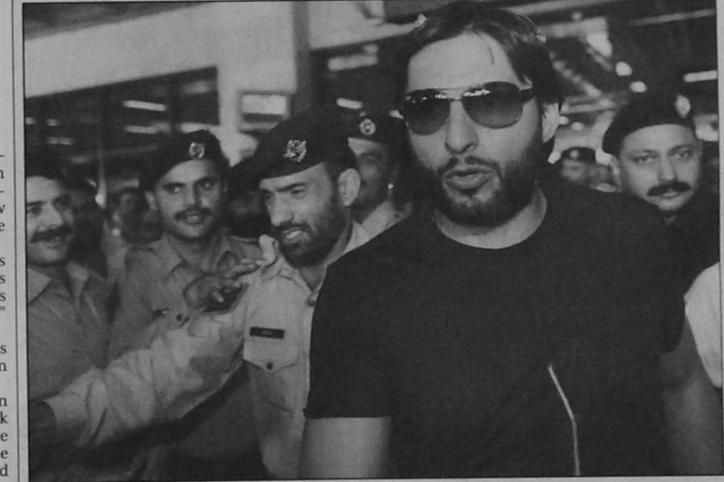


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi upon his arrival at the Karachi airport from South Africa yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 27 mins and a solution key at the bottom.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a 10x10 grid of letters and numbers for solving.

CRYPTOQUIP

OXEU XEBBFKFP OXFKE QFNMO-HFNNSFP IEK ULSFP UM VEDF RMIFHMPQ XF VFELFP? UXF DMOELP DMOFLFP. Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A PERSON WERE AN EXPERT IN EXAMINING LONG, NARROW CRACKS, WOULD THAT MAKE HIM A FISSUREMAN? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals H