



PHOTO AFP
Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic hits a forehand against Fernando Verdasco of Spain during their quarterfinal clash of the China Open in Beijing yesterday. Djokovic beat Verdasco 6-3, 1-6, 6-1.

Novak hot on Andy's heels

Tennis

AFP, Beijing

Novak Djokovic battled into the semifinals of the China Open on Friday with a three-set win over Spain's Fernando Verdasco, putting himself one win away from regaining the world number three ranking.

Djokovic, the second seed here, overpowered fifth seed Verdasco in the third and final set, 6-3, 1-6, 6-1.

The Serb will replace injured Scot Andy Murray in the ATP third spot behind Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal if he wins his next match against Roland Garros finalist Robin Soderling of Sweden, a winner over Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic.

Murray has withdrawn from next week's Shanghai Masters with a lingering wrist injury and will slide down the rankings by being inactive and losing the winner's points he gained the same week a year ago.

Should he beat Soderling, Djokovic -- the 2008 Australian Open champion -- would overtake Murray when the ATP rankings come out on October 19, one day after the Shanghai final.

"I thought I was playing well and consistent this year, but I still dropped a spot," said the Serb. "That meant others were playing really well, including Andy Murray."

"I was surprised he pulled out from Shanghai, but that's how tennis is. It isn't the end of the year -- there are still three or four tournaments to go."

In other action in Beijing, Russia's Svetlana Kuznetsova marched into the semifinals with a routine win, but compatriot Nikolay Davydenko was ousted in a straight-set upset.

Kuznetsova, the 2006 champion in Beijing, notched an easy 6-3, 6-3 victory over talented Russian teen Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, who earlier this week knocked Venus Williams out of the 6.6-million-dollar mixed WTA/ATP event.

The elder Russian, the reigning French

Open champion, will face compatriot Nadia Petrova in the semifinals after the 13th seed put out Peng Shuai -- the home crowd's last hope in the tournament -- 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-2.

Petrova upset soon-to-be world number one Serena Williams on Thursday to reach the quarters.

On the men's side, fourth seed Davydenko, who claimed his third title of the season last week in Kuala Lumpur, was upset by Croatian eighth seed Marin Cilic in just over 90 minutes, 6-4, 6-4.

The result halted Davydenko's current run of form at six consecutive wins while Cilic, who knocked Murray out in the US Open fourth round, improved to 3-0 over the world number eight Russian.

The 15th-ranked Croatian secured his 39th match win of the season against 16 losses as he bids for a third 2009 title, following victories in Chennai and Zagreb.

In the semifinals, Cilic will face either Nadal or Russia's Marat Safin, who were due to take centre court later Friday.

Golf, rugby sevens in 2016 Olympics

AFP, Copenhagen

Golf and rugby union sevens will be included as sports at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced on Friday.

IOC members rubber-stamped the two sports at a congress here after the executive board had voted to include them at a meeting in August.

Rugby sevens received 81 votes for and eight against with one abstention, while golf had 63 for and 27 against with two members abstaining.

The two sports will be included in the programme for the 2016 Rio Games, bringing the number of sports there to the IOC's stated maximum of 28.

Rugby sevens will see 12 teams each in men's and women's competition, with the sport's governing body the IRB having pledged to end its showcase World Cup Sevens tournament.

The International Golf Federation (IGF) has promised that the world's best will take part in Olympic golf, which will see 60

players in both the men and women's competitions facing off over 72 holes.

"We are elated that the IOC membership has accepted golf as an Olympic sport, and look forward to seeing the world's best golfers compete for gold at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro," said Ty Votaw, executive director of the IGF's Olympic Golf Committee, which has coordinated golf's Olympic bid.

"We have received unprecedented support from international golf organisations throughout this process, as well as from the world's top-ranked men and women players, which was critical to our success."

"We also stressed the universal nature of golf, with 60 million people playing the sport in more than 120 countries."

IRB president Bernard Lapasset also played on the universal appeal of rugby union sevens, which often sees upsets on its global circuit.

"This is a historic moment for our sport and for the global rugby community, who were united in support of our campaign," the Frenchman said.

"We are excited and honoured to be

joining the Olympic Games and I would like to thank the IOC members for believing in our Olympic vision and our values and recognising that rugby sevens is a perfect fit for the Olympic Games."

"The Olympic Games will be the pinnacle of the sport for all our athletes and the rugby family. The best men's and women's players in the world are excited to be able to showcase their talent on the world's greatest sporting stage."

"We are now looking forward to working in partnership with the IOC to develop and implement a Rugby Sevens tournament in Rio that will reach out to new audiences and inspire a new generation of sports fans around the world."

Softball, squash, baseball, karate and roller sports were also in contention for Olympic spots until their elimination by the executive board vote two months ago.

Both rugby and golf have been played previously at Olympics.

Golf was played at the Paris Games in 1900 and four years later in St Louis, while rugby was played between 1900-24, in the full 15-a-side format.

'T20 in a honeymoon period'

INTERNET, undated

Former Australia captain Steve Waugh believes the fate of One-day International (ODI) cricket, facing a survival threat from the Twenty20s, will be known in another year.

With Twenty20 cricket becoming popular among cricket fans, there are calls from players and officials to innovate the One-day format to keep the interest.

"I think we will know in next 12 months where One-day cricket is heading. Twenty20 is becoming popular. At the moment, Twenty20 is in a honeymoon period. Everyone wants to see a lot of action. That's what Twenty20 provides. It has a lot of value because it is entertaining and not time consuming."

"I think all three formats in cricket can exist. Different skills are required in the three formats. Test cricket will stay. It is the lifeline of the game," Waugh said on the sidelines of a function of Steve Waugh Foundation in Delhi on Friday.

Waugh said the upcoming one-day series between India and Australia would be a good test of the ODIs.

"What fans would like to see is an exciting contest and both teams can provide that. It is very important for the One-dayers that people fill the stadiums and enjoy their time watching good cricket."

Away from cricket, for Waugh, India is now almost a second home. He visits the country regularly for his charity foundation and feels more sportsperson can make an impact in the society.

"People of India have really appreciated my work. I want them to get involved in the charity and make a difference."

"Sportsmen are looked up to with a lot of respect. They can use their influence to raise awareness about the issues. They just have to spend a bit of time and effort, and work with passion for a cause."

Aus pick Holland for India

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Young spinner Jon Holland was the surprise selection on Friday in an injury-hit Australian squad for their seven one-day match series in India in October-November.

The 22-year-old left-arm finger spinner from Victoria impressed playing for Australia A in their recent home series against Pakistan as well as his time at Cricket Australia's Centre of Excellence, chief selector Andrew Hilditch said.

"Jon Holland is in the squad as we wanted to take the opportunity to give a young left arm finger spinner exposure both to the Australian team set-up and Indian conditions," Hilditch said.

"If an opportunity arises on tour we feel he will equip himself very well at international level."

Vice-captain Michael Clarke (back), wicketkeeper Brad Haddin (finger), batsman Callum Ferguson (knee) and paceman Nathan Bracken (knee) were not considered for the Indian tour because of their injuries, Hilditch said.

Mike Hussey will be skipper Ricky Ponting's team deputy for the series, which starts with an ODI in Vadodara on October 25.

"We do have four players unavailable for this tour due to injury," Hilditch said.

"Michael Clarke is continuing his rehabilitation from back soreness, while Brad Haddin continues his rehabilitation from finger surgery, following the injury he picked up during the Ashes series."

"Tim Paine, following a fine ICC Champions

Trophy, is selected as wicket keeper.

"Callum Ferguson continues to consult specialists over the knee injury he picked up during the ICC Champions Trophy final and is not available for this tour. Nathan Bracken is also unavailable due to a knee injury."

The Australians will have batsman Shaun Marsh back from a hamstring injury.

Hilditch said the selection panel was delighted with Australia's recent success at the ICC Champions Trophy in South Africa, which came off the back of a 6-1 ODI series win against England in England.

"To reclaim our number one ICC world ranking was recognition of this squad's recent achievements," he said.

"But we recognise we have to continue to improve and to establish a winning culture within this young group of players on tough tours, like this, to India."

"We expect the Indian series to be extremely testing but the young squad is looking forward to the challenge."

SQUAD

Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Hussey, Doug Bollinger, Nathan Hauritz, Jon Holland, Ben Hilfenhaus, James Hopes, Mitchell Johnson, Brett Lee, Shaun Marsh, Tim Paine, Peter Siddie, Adam Voges, Shane Watson, Cameron White.

TOURSCHEDULE

Oct 25 - 1st ODI, Vadodara
Oct 28 - 2nd ODI, Nagpur
Oct 31 - 3rd ODI, New Delhi
Nov 2 - 4th ODI, Mohali
Nov 5 - 5th ODI, Hyderabad
Nov 8 - 6th ODI, Guwahati
Nov 11 - 7th ODI, Mumbai

Tsonga in Japan Open semis

AFP, Tokyo

Second seed Jo-Wilfried Tsonga of France had to work hard to beat qualifier Ernests Gulbis of Latvia to reach the semifinals of the Japan Open tennis tournament on Friday.

The 2008 Australian Open finalist, the highest remaining seeded player in the tournament, shrugged of a one-set deficit to score a 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 victory over the 98th-ranked Latvian.

Earlier, Mikhail Youzhny of Russia eliminated defending champion Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic 6-2, 7-6 (8/6) to set up a semi-final meeting with 2001 champion Lleyton Hewitt of Australia.

Hewitt, seeded eighth, put an end to French qualifier Edouard Roger-Vasselin's excellent run with a 6-4, 6-0 victory.

In the last match of the day, fourth seed Gael Monfils of France defeated Beijing Olympic doubles gold medalist Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 to earn a place against Tsonga.

Gulbis, who eliminated sixth seed Radek Stepanek of the Czech Republic on his way to the quarter-finals, hit a double fault on Tsonga's set point to tie the match at one-set.

But he failed to secure a break opportunity in the final set, with Tsonga firing 19 aces, eight of them in the third set.

"I tried to (maintain) focus on my game, not on his serve, because it's very difficult when he served like that. He served just unbelievably today in the first two sets," said Tsonga, ranked seventh.

Champions

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Kotla Stadium. "We come here to watch Indian players and don't mind buying tickets for that," said another cricket enthusiast.

The official said the turnstile machines installed at different entry points at the Kotla to keep a record of the number of spectators are still non-functional.

"This has been done intentionally so that there is no official record of the turnout," the official alleged.

Friday's first match between Australia's New South Wales Blues and South Africa's Diamond Eagles saw just 5000 fans in the 42,000-seater stadium even though there were tickets available at an affordable rate of Rs.100.

KP in for SA tour

Cricket

AFP, London

Kevin Pietersen was Thursday included in England's one-day and Test squads for the tour of South Africa but warned he must prove his fitness before the one-day series starts on November 20.

The star batsman is still recovering from surgery on his achilles tendon, which he underwent in July. He is joined in both squads by another South African-born player, Jonathan Trott, who made a century on his Test debut in England's Ashes-winning victory over Australia at The Oval in August.

Pietersen has yet to play a Test in his homeland but he made a big impression there in 2004-05, when he started his England career by making three hundreds in five one-day internationals, during which he was repeatedly booed by some of his compatriots.

"Kevin Pietersen is making good progress with his recovery from surgery," England selector Geoff Miller reported. "He will join up with the rest of the squad in South Africa following the first two Twenty20 Internationals and his fitness will be reassessed ahead of the one-day series."

There was no place in either squad for fast bowler Steve Harmison, who had indicated he would quit inter-

national cricket if he missed out, or for Ravi Bopara, Owais Shah and Monty Panesar.

Andrew Strauss will skipper both squads but all-rounder Paul Collingwood will be in charge for the two Twenty20 internationals that precede the one-day matches, despite currently being sidelined with a torn buttock muscle.

Miller added: "Stephen Harmison has not been included in the Test squad because we feel his form has not been consistent enough over the past 12 months to justify a regular place in the side and we want to give an opportunity to other players to make a case for selection."

"Liam Plunkett has worked hard to improve all aspects of his game since he last played for England and his selection is reward for consistently putting in strong performances for Durham both with bat and ball. He will provide strong competition for a place in our pace attack this winter."

The Test squad, missing Andrew Flintoff following his retirement, contains three uncapped players: Surrey wicketkeeper Steven Davies, Yorkshire leg-spinner Adil Rashid and the Sussex all-rounder Luke Wright.

Essex opener Alastair Cook has been named as vice-captain of the Test squad and has also been recalled to the one-day squad -- at the expense of Bopara -- together with Lancashire quick bowler

Sajid Mahmood.

Miller described Davies, who will act as understudy to Matt Prior, as a player of "great potential" and said Wright had the chance to fill Flintoff's boots.

"The retirement of Andrew Flintoff has created a vacancy for an all-rounder in the squad and while we do not see Luke Wright as a like for like replacement for Andrew, we are excited by the way in which his all-round game continues to develop and believe he can make an impact at Test level," Miller said.

TEST SQUAD

Andrew Strauss (captain), Alastair Cook, James Anderson, Ian Bell, Stuart Broad (Nottinghamshire), Paul Collingwood, Steven Davies, Graham Onions, Kevin Pietersen, Liam Plunkett, Matt Prior, Adil Rashid, Ryan Sidebottom, Graeme Swann, Jonathan Trott, Luke Wright

ONE-DAY SQUAD

Andrew Strauss (captain), James Anderson, Tim Bresnan, Stuart Broad, Paul Collingwood, Alastair Cook, Joe Denly, Sajid Mahmood, Eoin Morgan, Graham Onions, Kevin Pietersen, Matt Prior, Adil Rashid, Graeme Swann, Jonathan Trott, Luke Wright

NSW overw

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McLaren took up the cudgels with a massive six off Steve Smith and a delicate paddle for four off Lee, but also had to farm the strike to shield the tail -- and that's not exactly easy in Twenty20 cricket. Clark never let the foot off the gas and capped an excellent evening with 3 for 12 from four overs, featuring masterful changes of pace and length, so key to this format.

Katich followed a fine effort with the bat by effecting two direct hits and taking a catch, as NSW showed why they are one of the favourites. Unlike their fellow South African representatives Cape Cobras, the Eagles pulled well below their weight against a formidable attack and slick fielding.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE: 180 for 4 in 20 overs (Uthappa 51, Dravid 28, Taylor 53 not out)
CAPE COBRAS: 184 for 5 in 19.4 overs (Duminy 99; P Kumar 3-32)

Result: Cape Cobras won by 5 wickets.
Man-of-the-match: JP Duminy.
Man-of-the-match: Simon Katich.

Duminy douses

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were sloppy in the field, putting down three catches and missing a run-out. Uthappa was the beneficiary of one sitter and a couple miscues that dropped safely, and flourished in Rahul Dravid's company after Langeveldt took out Jacques Kallis early. Using his feet regularly to try and get on top of the bowlers, Uthappa pulled off some stinging shots down the ground and over midwicket, each of which the partisan home crowd cheered with gusto.

Dravid, dropped on 16, played some crisp and orthodox shots before he was run out for 28, after which Kohli was stumped for 17. But Bangalore took 61 off their final four overs, 40 of them in boundaries off just eight balls by Taylor, who picked up a 24-ball half-



PHOTO AFP
Former Australia cricket captain Steve Waugh (R) gives tips to young Indian cricketers during a skill development event in New Delhi on Friday. The Steve Waugh Foundation India in association with Gup organized a 'Rare Cricket Experience' in the Indian capital to motivate local cricketers.