



TOP EIGHT: World number one Roger Federer (fourth from left) stands along with seven other top-ranked tennis players on a London street on Friday, ahead of the ATP World Tour Finals that begins today.

PHOTO: AFP

IAAF mum on Semenya

AFP, Monaco

World athletics' governing body, the IAAF, held their silence over South Africa's gender row 800m world champion Caster Semenya during the first day of their annual congress here on Friday.

The IAAF refused to be drawn on statements made by South African Sports Minister Makhene Stoile on Thursday that Semenya could compete again in women's athletics.

"In my view Caster Semenya's future is in her hands. She can decide to run as a girl, which she is," Stoile said.

But the IAAF maintained a diplomatic silence after an accord brokered with Semenya's lawyers and the South African government that said all had reached "total agreement" on her title won at the Berlin championships in August.

The parties also agreed that scientific tests into her gender will remain confidential, but their statement gave no clear details on the runner's competitive future.

On Wednesday however, the IAAF said that gender testing was not yet complete for the athlete, a first-year sports science student who grew up in a rural village in northern South Africa.

Semenya's rapid speed gains this year prompted questions about the gender of the runner, who has a deep voice and a muscular physique.

Leaked test results said Semenya was a hermaphrodite, sparking anger from the South African public and government, who have rallied behind the athlete.

Bond happy to be back

INTERNET, undated

Shane Bond says it's been a case of taking it "one step at a time" since returning from exile following his stint with the rebel Indian Cricket League.

The fast bowler has already made his return for New Zealand in the limited-overs arena but is poised to don the whites again for his country for the first time in two years next week when the Black Caps take on Pakistan in the first of three Tests.

"To get back into the Test arena and hopefully get another chance to play a Test is something I never thought would happen. I'm delighted," Bond told Press Association Sport.

"I didn't really think I'd get another opportunity to play for New Zealand so once the India stuff finished and I made myself available again I've never really wanted to get too far ahead of myself."

"I just wanted to play and work hard and see what happened."

"Now that I've been back it's gone really fast and things have gone really well. I've just got to keep doing those things I've been doing and hopefully the season continues on in the same vein."

Windies force draw

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The West Indians ended a difficult tour game on a high when they fought to secure a draw with a committed batting display against Queensland. After strong half-centuries to Ramnaresh Sarwan and Shivnarine Chanderpaul, the tourists can go to Thursday's first Test with some more confidence in their order after they finished the match at 6 for 357.

It was a much better return than the first three days, which began with them being bowled out for 271 on the opening afternoon before Queensland roared in reply with 7 for 617 declared.

The West Indians still have some problems to sort out in their attack, but their two main batsmen have found some important touch ahead of the three-Test series.

With Chris Gayle a major doubt due to his mother's illness in Jamaica, Sarwan and Chanderpaul are likely to have more responsibility and it was the experienced pair who guided the side for much of the day during a 131-run stand. Sarwan stayed off the field on Friday due to a rash and he had a couple of breaks for treatment on his left leg, but there were few problems

with his batting until after reaching his half-century. A fine cover drive off Nathan Rimmington showed his confidence, but he was reprieved on 58 by Nick Kruger in the gully and given out lbw on 66 to Alastair McDermott in the last over before tea.

At the other end Chanderpaul was as determined as usual, remaining unfurled on another warm day in Brisbane. He peaked with a six over square leg and an off-drive for four in the same over from the legspinner Daniel Doran, but was mostly happy to work the ball around. It was just what the West Indians needed and they eventually erased the 346-run deficit after the first innings.

However, the situation became nervy when Chanderpaul was caught at slip pushing at the offspinner Chris Simpson for 69. The scenario could have been even worse if Dan Doran had taken a tough chance off Brendan Nash earlier in the over, but Nash (36) and Denesh Ramdin (20) ensured there were no further losses and the game was called off an hour early.

In the first session the tourists gave up the gains of their strong finish to the third afternoon. The opener Adrian Barath, who resumed on 65, began with two crisp cover drives off Nathan Feldman before he and Narsingh

Deonarine departed in four balls.

Deonarine (14) was caught at first slip by Simpson off Feldman and Rimmington collected the first of his two victims when he brushed Barath's edge. Barath wasn't pleased with the decision and was reluctant to leave, but he could walk off satisfied with a 74 that should seal his Test place.

With time running out before the game at the Gabba, the West Indians are still waiting to learn about Gayle's availability. At least the tourists know that both their remaining openers are in some touch following Travis Dowlin's 53 on Friday afternoon.

Dwayne Bravo left a dint on the Stuart Law Stand roof with a pulled six from a Doran short ball, but he was unable to play with such ease against Rimmington. Bravo was 16 when he was caught in front and will look for more work in the nets over the next four days.

Nat'l booters'

FROM PAGE 17

Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Group B along with Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bhutan while Group A consist of holders Maldives, India, Afghanistan and Nepal.

2003 champions Bangladesh will start their campaign by taking on Bhutan in one of the two opening day matches on December 4 at Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Bangladesh's next matches against Pakistan and Sri Lanka will take place on December 6 and December 8 respectively.

BFF announced a 20-member selection for the practice game and they are Zia, Mamun, Mohammad Sujan, Shuvro, Nazrul, Abdullah Parvez, Obaidur, Joy, Sharif, Matiur Munna, Faisal Mahmud, Shakil, Pappu, Alfaz, Tapu, Aminul, Abul, Nasir, Mubarak and Munna.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had also suspended Iraq's Olympic Committee from international competition, but that row was resolved shortly before the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Since the overthrow of Saddam in the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq's new mainly Shiite leadership has taken control of the Olympic Committee and all the other sports federations, except the IFA.

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FIFA bans Iraq

FROM PAGE 20

"It's an unfair decision (that) was taken without hearing the Iraqi Olympic Committee," government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said.

"We feel that the IFA was behind the decision of FIFA to suspend the Iraqi federation," Dabbagh, who is also responsible for organising IFA elections, told AFP.

"We are going to work with the Iraqi Olympic Committee to apply the national laws in respect of the FIFA regulations.

"FIFA has to respect the positions of the football clubs of Iraq who don't want to accept the executive board of IFA, (which) is involved in corruption and violation of Iraq laws."

But IFA chief Hussein Saeed said the "FIFA decision was expected after the IOC's decision to dissolve the IFA, which is an illegal approach".

Football is highly popular in Iraq and its importance was boosted by the national side's victory in the 2007 Asian Nations Cup.

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SA plans special courts

FROM PAGE 20

as volunteers to help with administrative issues, will also receive special training for the World Cup courts.

South Africa has already used a similar system during school holidays to allow traffic offenders to settle their cases in just one day.

"The South African authorities are obviously aware the crime may be an issue for foreign visitors," Jordi said. "This scheme is another indication that the authorities will be harsh on those who commit crimes during the World Cup."

Since President Jacob Zuma took office in May, the government has stepped up

efforts to fight crime, with the deputy police minister last week telling police to "shoot the bastards" when dealing with violent criminals.

The so-called "shoot to kill" policy has sparked intense public debate following the shooting deaths of bystanders, including a three-year-old boy last week.

Jordi said the speed of the special courts could also limit the ability to follow up on any such cases of abuse.

"Speedy justice can be problematic because accused persons are not given an adequate opportunity to consider how best to defend themselves," he said.

Federer, Nadal ready for battle

Tennis

AFP, London

Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal will stage the last chapter of their battle to finish the year as world number one when the ATP Tour Finals get under way in London today.

Federer goes into the Tour Finals at the O2 Arena top of the world rankings, but the Wimbledon champion knows second placed Nadal can still snatch first place if the Spaniard wins the prestigious end-of-year event.

The race for pole position is the latest instalment of an enthralling rivalry between two of the sport's all-time greats. Although Federer and Nadal remain friendly enough off the court, the Swiss star relishes his position as tennis's pre-eminent force and has no intention of surrendering it over the next week.

"I am aware of it (the race to finish world number one) and I will be lying if I said I was just here to play well," said Federer, who kicks off his Group A campaign against Spain's Fernando Verdasco on Sunday.

"Definitely I am here to win the tournament and to try to stay number one in the world. It is obvious."

The competition is really stiff so it is not going to be easy for me or Rafa if he wants to get it."

"I think it is fun that it is on the line for the last tournament of the season. I will try my best and see where it takes me."

While Federer is setting his sights firmly on that number one position, Nadal is less concerned about the ranking.

The four-time French Open champion has endured the most traumatic year of his career, with his parents' separation proving a significant distraction before injury denied him the chance to defend his Wimbledon title.

Now fully fit again Nadal, 23, claims he is just relieved to be able to test himself against the world's best again.

"I feel perfect in all aspects, mentally and physically," he said. "I will play against the best players in the world so I can lose every match but I can win every game as well."

"For me the main thing is to be here and enjoy this experience. The rest, finishing number one doesn't matter. My only goal is to try to play my best tennis here in London."

"If I am competitive then I am more than happy. To be number one I have to win the tournament. I can't lose any matches so for me it is not a real chance."

British number one Andy Murray and Juan Martin del Potro, who beat the Swiss in September's US Open final, are also in Federer's group.

Group B features Nadal, reigning Tour Finals champion Novak Djokovic,

Nikolay Davydenko and Sweden's Robin Soderling, who was handed his place when Wimbledon finalist Andy Roddick pulled out through injury earlier this week.

London is staging the Finals for the first time in the event's 40-year history and, while Federer and Nadal can't meet before the semifinals, the sell-out crowds in the English capital will see a host of other intriguing ties, starting with home favourite Murray's clash against US Open champion Del Potro in the event's opening match today.

Murray, 23, has long been regarded as a potential grand slam champion, but while the British number one is still to win his first major, Del Potro, 21, has already done just that, fighting back from two sets to one down to beat Roger Federer in New York.

Del Potro hardly eased the pressure on Murray when he admitted that he expected the Scot to be a grand slam champion by now.

The Argentinian said: "I am a little bit surprised he hasn't won a grand slam yet. That was maybe his goal for this year but he can do it next year. I didn't expect to win one myself before next year or 2011."

"We will play a good match. I know his strengths and weaknesses and he knows everything about my game."

"He is the local player and 20,000 people will be cheering for him."

Mercedes keen on Schumi

INTERNET, undated

Eddie Jordan is convinced that seven-times world champion Michael Schumacher will return to the grid in 2010 to drive for Mercedes Grand Prix.

Since taking over Brawn GP, Mercedes have been expected to put together an all-German driver line-up to rival McLaren's all-British team of Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton.

Former Williams driver Nico Rosberg is set to be unveiled as one of the two, with BMW-Sauber refugee Nick Heidfeld presumed to be the other -- until late speculation that Schumacher could return.

Schumacher's spokeswoman Sabine Kehm played down the rumours, despite conceding that she would never say never, and Jordan believes the lure of the competition is one that has proven too strong for the 91-time grand prix-winner to resist.

"The possibility is being actively pursued and I believe it's going to happen," Jordan told the BBC.

"It started with a meeting between Michael, Ross Brawn and Daimler chief executive Dieter Zetsche at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

"At the moment, it is not possible for Michael to drive for Mercedes because he has a consultancy contract with Ferrari -- but I understand he was due to meet Ferrari President Luca di Montezemolo with a view to him being released, and that it will be approved because it is in the interests of the team."

In addition, the motorcycling neck injury that kept Schumacher from filling in for Massa