



Winners of the Grameenphone 24th ITF Junior Tennis Championships are seen with the guests as they pose with their trophies at the end of the nine-day international meet at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday.

Schumi 'fully charged'

INTERNET, undated

Michael Schumacher has said that he feels 'like a child looking forward to Christmas' as he gears up for his return to the sport with Mercedes Grand Prix and the F1 2010 season opener in Bahrain next weekend.

Schumacher, who is statistically the most successful driver in the history of F1, almost came back last year, when Felipe Massa suffered his horrific crash in Hungary. However, a neck injury meant he was unable to fill the void.

Now though, the German is going to race again at the pinnacle of the sport and the seven-time world champion insists that his batteries are completely recharged.

"Finally the season will start! I feel like a child looking forward to Christmas. The decision to make my comeback feels like a long time ago now and I can hardly wait for the season to get underway in Bahrain," he noted. "It's funny to think that I will be competing in F1 again when just a few months ago, I would have declined the opportunity categorically."

"But sometimes things change and the right circumstances come together. I feel fresher than I have for many years. I am perfectly prepared physically and most importantly, my energy is back completely."

"When I retired from racing in 2006, my batteries were simply empty. Now they are totally recharged and I am ready for the challenge. It is the competition at the highest level that only F1 offers which has provided the temptation for me."

Pressed on his prospects and that of Mercedes, Schumacher refused to make any lofty predictions, although he did add that the Blackberry-based outfit which won the titles last year of course as Brawn GP will be up there with the likes of Ferrari, McLaren and Red Bull.

'I'll miss Test cricket'

INTERNET, undated

He retired from Test cricket to prolong his ODI and Twenty20 career but injury-plagued Australian pacer Brett Lee says he would miss the excitement and challenge that characterises the longer version of the game.

Lee, who is in India to participate in the third edition of the Indian Premier League starting March 12, wants to test his fitness and pace in the upcoming event in a bid to reclaim his position in the national team for the this year's Twenty20 and the 2011 ODI World Cup.

"I am satisfied with my Test career and longevity. All those years were really exciting and challenging for me and I will miss those things. It was a tough decision to call it quit," Lee, who plays for Kings XI Punjab, said.

"I could feel that my body couldn't take any more as Test cricket is more demanding. I took the retirement decision because of lifestyle reasons. "Then there were injuries and that's the tough time. I just want to prolong my career in ODIs and Twenty20. Want to play some more matches for the country. That's why I took the decision to continue playing in shorter formats," said Lee, who made his Test debut against India in 1999, finishing with seven wickets in the match. The 33-year-old pacer's career has been hampered by injuries which restricted him to 76 Tests.

One of the games fastest ever bowlers at his peak, with deliveries recorded at up to 161 kph, Lee has taken 310 wickets for his country, leaving him fourth on the Australian all-time list behind Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath and Dennis Lillee, and 22nd among wicket-takers for all nations. Lee, who is undergoing

rehabilitation with physio Patrick Farhart to get to cricket after a four-month absence with an elbow injury, was unsure of his participation in his team's first IPL match against Delhi Daredevils on March 13.

"I can't say whether I would be playing the first match or not. I am recovering well from my elbow injury. I've been working very closely with my physio. I am practicing hard in the nets, and things are shaping up well," he said.

Lee, who calls India his second home, was satisfied with the security arrangements made by the organisers and said safety measures for the IPL will leave no room for worry among the players.

"Security is good and as such there are no concerns. India is a safe place to play. There were certain apprehensions about the security arrangements back home, but that's important and you need to look at it also."

Australians were wary of coming to India after threats by right-wing Hindu group Shiv Sena. Then there were also threats from the al-Qaeda terror network to disrupt the event.

But Lee said, "It's great to be back on Indian soil as I love to play here. I know crowd would be expecting some good performances from me and I won't let them disappointed." On being asked about the importance of pace in Twenty20 games and whether he would be eyeing the 160 kph record set by Australian pacer Shaun Tait, the cricketer said, "Fast bowling is part of the game and being a fast bowler, I believe pace is always required in all three formats of the game to unsettle the opposition."

"Pace always plays a major role in Twenty20 cricket. It's a fast-paced game and every

over counts. So, generation of pace becomes lot more important in T20 format.

"I am not thinking of breaking any records. Just want to play good cricket. I will not try to break 160 mark barrier set by my Australian team-mate Shaun Tait as I have already done (touching 160 kph) in the past. I will generate pace but not with any records in the mind," he added.

Woods turns down new contract

AFP, Dublin

US golfer Tiger Woods has turned down a 75-million-dollar sponsorship offer from bookmakers Paddy Power, the Irish firm revealed on Friday.

Paddy Power had made an initial offer to pay the sum over a five-year period but, after talks with Woods' management company IMG, that was rejected.

But Paddy Power aim to continue talks before making a revised offer.

In a statement Paddy Power said: "Paddy Power remains keen to work with Tiger Woods, and will re-engage with IMG."

"An enhanced offer will be made, the details of which will remain confidential."

Woods has lost a number of high-profile sponsors following the publicity surrounding allegations that he had extra-marital affairs.

He has yet to return to playing and recently made a public apology over his actions.

Tigers slide against

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a couple of one-dayers and he made up his shortfall with a 46 that ended badly in a run-out.

Mahmudullah Riyad had a wonderful time in New Zealand but the one who turned out against England looked like a distant second cousin of the man who blasted the Black Caps only a few weeks back. Maybe it was just a blip.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan always looked dangerous but never made anything of the starts he got. But he got a bad decision in the final game in Chittagong and while that doesn't fix everything, it surely won't hurt him ahead of the

Test series. But his bowling never seems to lose its fizz even after he falls with the bat or while captaining the side.

Shakib's captaincy has actually garnered much praise for handling his bowlers quite well but he can do without a few major problems. While batting surely is a headache, Mushfiqur Rahim's wicketkeeping and bowling at the death are worries he can do without.

Both Shaiful Islam and Rubel Hossain looked easy to hit after the 40th over and during the final Powerplay. In fact Shakib pointed at both bowlers being his main men

during the five-over restriction so it was disappointing how Shaiful's bowling imploded in that fateful over against Eoin Morgan.

Mushfiqur's keeping gave the feeling that either he is spending too much time in front of the stumps or it is just fatigue. He hasn't had a break for a long time and the added duty of batting up the order maybe taking its toll.

The first Test starts in Chittagong in six days time and while it is not long enough to fix many of the problems, the hope remains it's a better show than what took place in 2003.

Diao focused

FROM PAGE 20

Stoke have to go back to a League Cup tie in 1995 for their last victory over the Blues and 1934 for their last win over them in the FA Cup.

However, even Blues assistant manager Ray Wilkins is giving Tony Pulis's side a chance.

"We play against a Stoke side that has had a fantastic season up to now, and they play with a lot of quality as well," the former England captain said.

"We're in for a very tough game. "They have quality. What Tony Pulis has done has been quite exceptional and they've played with a lot of style at times. "Yes, we'll have to defend

all players make mistakes. "I've been thrilled with the way he's played, I thought he was excellent against Egypt and we have no qualms whatsoever, he's been in what, top form for us."

Chelsea will be without suspended midfielder Michael Ballack and the versatile Juliano Belletti. Centre-half Ricardo Carvalho faces a late fitness test.

The Blues said Friday their Portugal full-back Jose Bosingwa was out for rest of season and the World Cup with knee injury.

Carlo Ancelotti's side are still without injury victims Petr Cech in goal, left-back Ashley Cole and midfielder Michael Essien.

NEW ZEALAND V AUSTRALIA, 2ND ODI, AUCKLAND Tourists draw level

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Daniel Vettori stuck his stiff neck out with a brilliant innings that nearly delivered victory for New Zealand but Ryan Harris chopped him off to end the plucky fight as Australia levelled the series 1-1. There were some very nervous moments for Australia as they let New Zealand recover from 131 for 6 to almost reach their goal of 266 before the visitors' blushes were saved.

It came down to 13 required from 11 balls when Vettori walked across his stumps and attempted a shot he had used to great effect throughout his innings. However, this time when he tried to flick Harris behind square leg his stumps were rattled, his fightback finished at 70 from 49 balls, and Australia avoided going down 2-0 with three to play.

Vettori almost sat out of the game -- he would have rested his sore neck again had his vice-captain Ross Taylor not been a late withdrawal with a leg injury -- and he ended up as the Man of the Match in his lost cause. He compiled important lower-order partnerships with Gareth Hopkins and Daryl Tuffey before Mitchell Johnson and

Ryan Harris ended the dream. Johnson went from villain to hero for Australia with a four-wicket haul that included two breakthroughs at the top of the order and two vital strikes to remove Vettori's partners. Johnson had been booed when he first walked to the crease, following his altercation with Scott Styris in Napier, but by the end he had let his bowling do the talking.

He had Tuffey caught at slip for 20 and bowled Shane Bond for 6 to help Australia over the line after they looked to be cruising when rain interrupted New Zealand's chase. The hosts lost five overs and had their target reduced by eight runs and it was the loss of top-order wickets that was the big problem for them.

Brendon McCullum had struck two sixes in his 24 before he fell to a brilliant catch from Brad Haddin, leaping high to his right to take the ball in front of first slip's face off Johnson. Harris followed by trapping Peter Ingram and Neil Broom lbw from consecutive balls and although James Franklin survived the hat-trick ball, he was soon caught behind off Johnson to leave New Zealand at 46 for 4.

The resistance started with Scott Styris' 46 and 35 from Hopkins, before Vettori started

to find the gaps and improvised by walking across his stumps and backing away with superb judgment. In the end it wasn't enough but Australia cannot sit back and assume that all is hunky-dory.

Ricky Ponting and Michael Clarke, their captain and vice-captain, fell to dreadful shots before they were settled and there was a 300-plus total on offer after the openers pushed the score to 73 for 0 in the 14th over. Shane Watson made a brilliant 47 from 48 before he picked out the man at deep midwicket off Tuffey.

Haddin (53) looked like anchoring the innings and twice sent Vettori deliveries back over the bowler's head for six. He was trying a similar drive when Vettori took a lightning fast reflex catch thrusting out his left hand as Haddin's shot seemed to be rocketing past him.

At least Haddin could consider himself a trifle unlucky. Ponting had nobody to blame but himself when from his fourth ball he went for an uncharacteristic wild swipe at Vettori and skied a catch to cover. Clarke made 11 and also failed to show his best judgment when he tried a strange, mangled pull from outside off that lobbed to mid-on and gave Bond his first of two wickets.

From there, it was Michael Hussey (56) and Cameron White who rebuilt. White compiled his runs steadily until the 43rd over, when he launched Franklin for two sixes from the first two deliveries. Neither came out of the middle of the bat but the small Eden Park dimensions allowed him to clear the boundary a midwicket and mid-on.

However, when he tried to do the same with the third ball he mistimed it and was taken on long-on by McCullum for 54. The drama didn't end there as Franklin left the field along with the batsman, having hurt his hamstring. It added to an ultimately disappointing day for New Zealand, who had already lost Jacob Oram to a knee injury in the first game. But as Vettori showed, the walking wounded can still fight.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 273 for 7 in 50 overs (Hussey 56, White 54, Haddin 53, Watson 47, Hopes 29; Bond 2-42, Vettori 2-43) NEW ZEALAND: 253 for all out in 43.2 overs (Vettori 70, Styris 46, Hopkins 35, McCullum 24, Tuffey 20; Johnson 4-51, Harris 3-34, Watson 2-33) Result: Australia won by 12 runs on D/L Method. Man-of-the-match: Daniel Vettori.

MCC retreats on IPL

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

MCC has not put forward a bid to be part of one of the new IPL franchises after deciding their role lies in a "broader relationship" with the tournament.

Keith Bradshaw, the MCC chief executive, had previously confirmed the club were interested in taking a stake in one of the two IPL franchises that will join the existing eight from 2011.

Bradshaw, along with a committee trustee Anthony Wreford, travelled to India to talk with potential consortium members, but after an MCC committee meeting at Lord's earlier this week they won't be linking up with Lalit Modi's enterprise.

"After a healthy debate and a thorough investigation, MCC's Committee has decided to uphold the recommendation of our working party not to proceed as an equity stakeholder in a new IPL franchise," Bradshaw said. "Having said that, we will continue to discuss other ideas with the IPL and, through their support of the MCC spirit of cricket campaign, maintain a close working relationship with them."

"The world of cricket is fast-changing and there's no doubt the IPL is going to be a central part of that world for the foreseeable future. We will remain in close contact with the IPL to develop mutually beneficial opportunities."

John Barclay, MCC's president, and their head of cricket John Stephenson will attend the opening ceremony of IPL 3 in Mumbai next week.

Shoaib to appeal fine

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Shoaib Akhtar has hit out at the Pakistan board's decision to deduct 7 million rupees (82,353 dollars) from his annual earnings as punishment for a contested misdemeanor under the previous PCB regime.

Shoaib was banned for five years by Nasim Ashraf's administration in April 2008 for what it claimed were several violations of the players' disciplinary code of conduct. After an appeal, the ban was reduced in June to 18 months and the fine remained.

But Shoaib went to the Lahore High Court to appeal against that and the court immediately suspended the ban, but deferred judgment on the fine. Since then the current PCB administration said it sent reminders to Shoaib about the fine; having not received a reply, they deducted the entire amount last month from his annual earnings, which included his central contract payments, match fees and win bonuses (from January 2009 to November 2009).

Shoaib was due to earn Rs 7,044, 971 (\$82,882) in that period but was instead sent a cheque for just Rs 44,971 (\$529). He will contest the decision to deduct the fine. "I didn't even speak badly about a chairman, I just spoke about how wickets were poor in Nasim Ashraf's time (he had actually criticised the administration for demoting him in the central contracts category), so why has my money been deducted?" Shoaib said at the National Stadium in Karachi.

"That is a lifetime earning for most people. I am just saying why has my money been deducted, on what basis? If they wanted to cut it, don't give me a central contract."

"The court did not give any such verdict that the board is saying that he can play but cut his money. The case I did was not just on playing but on the fine as well. All of that was suspended. I am appealing it now. I will take it further and I will not let it finish like this."

Shoaib recently returned to action after another lengthy lay-off due to major knee surgery. He led the Islamabad Leopards side in what was a virtual quarter-final against the Faisalabad Wolves in the RBS Twenty20 cup. His side was comprehensively beaten but Shoaib bowled his four overs on the trot, an impressive spell in which he picked up one wicket as well.

Though he hasn't represented Pakistan for almost a year and hasn't played a Test since December 2007, he refused to rule out a comeback to any of the formats. He will not, he insisted, go the route of an increasing number of fast bowlers, who have chosen to step away from five-day cricket to prolong their career in the limited-overs format.

"There is nothing on my mind about retiring from any formats," Shoaib said. "I will play Test cricket, ODI and Twenty20 as well. You have seen my pace today. This is my first match in five months and I had a big operation on my knee. No fast bowler makes a recovery so quickly but I have done and you can see it. Brett Lee has been unfit for seven months, Shaun Tait plays T20s, or the Champions Trophy or the World Cup. All the fastest

bowlers in the world, Flintoff, Tait, Lee, we cannot play all year constantly."

Though Shoaib was not named in the 30 probabilities for the World Twenty20 in April, he retained hope that he could make his way in as a "wildcard" option. The arrival of a former fast bowler, Waqar Younis, as coach, he believes, might prove a boon.

"Pakistan should have a wildcard with them. Even Abdul Razaq went last time like that. I don't know what the board wants or wants to see. I am bowling, I am fit. Playing me is up to the board, coach and selectors. Hopefully the PCB will realise this and bring me back in the 30 probabilities. For the first time there is a fast bowler coming in as coach who will understand fast bowlers. He can deal with fast bowlers properly, save them and help them excel."

IPL to name

FROM PAGE 17

70-80 licensees before the end of the year. The royalty paid by the licensees will be shared among the IPL and the teams," he said. The branded t-shirts would be priced at the lower range of Rs 40,000 for women and Rs 70,000 for men, it was announced at the media conference.

Rating

FROM PAGE 17

press release. Before the start of the first round, all players and officials observed a one-minute silence for the death of Umme Kulsum, mother of rated player Kazi Mahub Afzal.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 — jongg or standstill

4 Visibility Whopper hindrance

8 Be a model

12 Sch. org.

13 Ugandan despot

14 Easter emblem

15 Sharp turns

17 Shaving cream add-in

18 Knock

19 Snuck

21 Nicklaus contemporary

24 Foreman rival

26 Pinch

28 Incenses

32 Equivoques

34 Tie up the phone

36 Manage somehow

37 Modify

39 Knight's address

41 Once called

42 Scull need

44 Big Mac

46 Fame

50 Doo follower

51 Diner employee

52 Terrier type

56 Heche or Hathaway

57 List-ending abbr.

58 401(k) alternative

59 Stagger

60 Say it ain't so

61 Roulette bet

2 —

3 Tiny, as a fracture

4 Occur

5 Parisian pal

6 Fizzazz

7 Pollow as a result

8 Credit cards

9 Rem-brandt creations

10 With 11-Down, having dark peepers

11 See 10-Down

16 Aries

20 Corn spike

21 One of the Three Bears

22 Astringent

23 Horse and buggy, e.g.

27 — de Deus

29 Classical-music lover

30 Foil's cousin

31 Crystal gazer

33 Diver's aid

35 Chest protector

38 Pop

40 Without courtesy

43 Used 42-Across

45 "Go, team!"

46 Cicatrix

47 Sound quality

48 Top-notch

49 Wee parasite

53 Scooted

54 Wager

55 "Way cool!"

Solution time: 25 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

GPGU AWMJG LRVAG ECXWGA

ZGL VM C JGULCWM ALCLG

TMWPGUAWLO JCZDTA, LRGO'PG

UGZCWMGX DGMM DCEA.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DESIRING TO HIDE THE PRECIOUS PIECES OF FRUIT IT IIAS FOUND, A GROUNDHOG OFTEN BURIES BERRIES.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals V