

Anderson mystified by knee injury

AFP, Manchester

England quick James Anderson is still baffled as to the cause of his longstanding knee injury but expects to be in action again next week.

The Lancashire paceman sat out England's recently concluded tour of Bangladesh after being advised rest and rehabilitation was the best way to cure a right knee problem that had troubled him throughout the preceding tour of South Africa.

Anderson, who intends playing for Lancashire against Durham University next week ahead of the start of the English season proper, said that while the cause of his injury had still to be diagnosed, he now felt in good shape.

"The knee is good; the rehab has been going well," Anderson told Thursday's Manchester Evening News.

"I had three weeks off when I got back from South Africa and have been gradually building up from there. I started bowling a couple of weeks ago and am bowling at about three-quarters pace at the moment."

Anderson added: "I don't know exactly what the problem was. I went to see a surgeon in London, and he didn't know what it was."

"All the doctors I have seen didn't have a clue, so we just spread a bit of cortisone around where I pointed at, where the pain was, and we left it for three weeks."

"We injected it at the start of the tour of South Africa, and had three more injections on that trip," he said.

"It can be quite difficult to decipher what is a niggle and what can cause you problems -- because as a bowler you are never really 100 percent fit. You always have a niggle or two."

"This one started as a niggle and just got worse and worse."

"The aim is to play against Durham University and then play it by ear. Lancashire have a few more warm-up games, but we will take it day by day and see how the knee pulls up."

Symonds cautions IPL overkill

CRICINFO, undated

Andrew Symonds, the Deccan Chargers allrounder, has said the increase in the sheer amount of cricket and tighter schedules may affect the quality of cricket in subsequent seasons of the IPL, and has called for better planning as the tournament grows in size.

"People always want more, they want to get bigger and faster. (What) worries me is that players are going to play more in the same period of time," Symonds told Hindustan Times. "I don't know if the quality of cricket will be as high because they will get tired. They will get injured and that's a concern."

The IPL in its current format features 60 matches between the eight franchises. With the addition of two new franchises, the next season could have 94 matches if the current format is retained, and Symonds cautioned against the impending overkill.

"Lalit (Modi) needs a band of merry men who are going to put their heads together and ensure they get it right. He obviously wants the IPL to be the best and the most special thing in cricket. But to get that you have to look after your cattle, you can't just keep driving and whipping them."

Aus must make a statement, says Ricky

INTERNET, undated

Australia captain Ricky Ponting has instructed his side to go out and make a statement in the second Test against New Zealand.

Australia are 1-0 up in the two-match series and are red hot favourites to make it a clean sweep in Hamilton after claiming a 10-wicket win earlier this week in Wellington.

"Every Test match we play, I think it's important that we make statements every game," said Ponting.

"Inconsistency was something that plagued us 18 months ago. I think with the Australian summer and certainly with this tour here, we've played some very consistent cricket and that's a good sign for us."

"We all know how quickly that can change, though, if you just take your eye off things that you need to be concentrating on every day, then the game can turn on you really quickly."

"We're always looking at ways to improve and for individuals to find ways to improve themselves. If that happens the results usually look after themselves."



Venus Williams of the United States plays a forehand return against Sorana Cirstea of Romania during their Sony Ericsson Open match at the Crandon Park Tennis Centre on Thursday.

Keep Pietersen at three: Vaughan

Cricket

AFP, London

Former England captain Michael Vaughan has said the side must stick with Kevin Pietersen as their number three batsman.

Historically, teams have deployed their star batsman at first wicket down to give him the best chance of dictating the course of a match without, if the openers do their job, having necessarily to start against the new ball.

Pietersen has spent most of his England career as a number four batsman but in the final Test against Bangladesh, concluded Wednesday, in Mirpur he made 45 and 74 not out at No 3 as the tourists wrapped up a 2-0 series win.

South Africa-born Pietersen had been struggling for runs following four months out with an Achilles injury and found life tough going against Bangladesh's left-arm spinner in particular.

But he remains England's best batsman and, if fit, is likely to have a key role for the team in a busy year that ends with an Ashes tour of Australia in the lead-up to the 2011 World Cup in Asia.

"He is a class act," said Vaughan. "I liked the way he went up to number three in the last game -- and I'd like to see him playing there more consistently, because at number three you can make such a difference."

'Schumi has more to lose than gain'

INTERNET, undated



Michael Schumacher's former long-time teammate Rubens Barrichello has warned that the record-breaking German legend 'has more to lose than gain' on his celebrated comeback to active competition in F1 2010 -- reasoning that with a legacy such as his, the only way surely is down.

Prior to hanging up his helmet at the end of his 16th campaign at the highest level in 2006, Schumacher had notched up an unrivalled seven drivers' world championship crowns, 91 grand prix victories, 154 podium finishes and a staggering 1,369 points -- records that in all likelihood, might never be beaten.

Three years on, however, and the 41-year-old's much-hyped return to the starting grid with Mercedes Grand Prix yielded a distant sixth place in the curtain-raising Bahrain Grand Prix at Sakhir earlier this month, behind young teammate and compatriot Nico Rosberg -- distinctly unaccustomed territory and a far cry from Schumi's dominance of yore.

What's more, with the likes of Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button at McLaren-Mercedes, Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa at Schumacher's former employers Ferrari and

Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber at Red Bull Racing, that may well be far from the only time the Kerpen native finishes so far down the order in 2010 -- a season that has been touted as the most open, unpredictable and fiercely-competitive in years. It is not, Barrichello cautions, the same F1 that he walked away from three years ago.

"I've got to be careful with whatever I say there, because it always sounds very dodgy

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 17 that were decided yesterday, Bangladesh took all three gold, a silver and three bronze.

Men's football team played out a goalless draw with their West Bengal counterparts as the women did a day earlier at the Khardaha Vidyasagar Stadium.

Pathan blows

FROM PAGE 17 22 in his 4 overs. Tait was ably supported by Sumit Narwal who took 2 for 35 and his captain Shane Warne who bowled a typically economical 4 over spell conceding only 15.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DECCAN CHARGERS: 148 for 9 (Sharma 49, Gibbs 25, Symonds 22; Tait 3-22)

RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 151 for 2 from 15.4 overs (Pathan 73 not out, Lumb 45; Ojha 1-40)

Result: Rajasthan Royals won by 8 wickets

coming out of my mouth," confessed the man who acted as a subservient if sometimes grudging second fiddle to Schumacher at the Scuderia from 2000 until 2005. "[Honestly], I think he can do well this year, but when he left he was winning all the time, so for me he has more to lose than gain.

"If he doesn't care about that and he's doing it for pure pleasure then he's fine if Formula 1 wasn't watched on TV or by journalists and you had just the pleasure of yourself looking in the mirror... That's how I took 2007 and 2008 because I had a terrible car, but I drove races [where] I finished 13th better than when I won races with better cars. I had to look at myself and be happy with what I was doing. Hopefully he is doing it for his own pleasure, and if so that is fine."

As to the much-debated new regulations in 2010, the Brazilian the most experienced driver of all time in the top flight conceded that Schumacher will soon adapt, even if he may not do so quite quickly enough to fulfil his stated pre-season goal of challenging the sport's young guns for an extraordinary eighth drivers' title.

SONY ERICSSON OPEN

Venus starts with a win

Tennis

AP, Key Biscayne

Venus Williams said she looked "solid" in her opening match at the Sony Ericsson Open, a rather drab adjective considering she played in a red corset.

It was more like an eye-popping victory. Williams began a bid for a fourth Key Biscayne title and her first since 2001 by beating Sorana Cirstea 6-4, 6-3 Thursday night.

As is customary for the Williams sisters at the start of a tournament, Venus unveiled a new outfit: a corset with spaghetti straps and a flounce. The first eight questions at her post-match news conference addressed the 1890s-style dress.

"Like 'Can-Can,'" she said. "The motif is really about sporty sexy, and kind of that whole attitude of bringing that to my game. I usually don't wear red. This is kind of new for me."

The dress will be back in the third round, when the No. 3-seeded Williams plays unseeded Roberta Vinci, who beat No. 30 Anabel Medina Garrigues 6-4, 7-6 (5). With sister Serena sidelined by a knee injury, Venus may be the woman to beat in a tournament she considers her hometown event.

"I haven't had a win here in awhile, and I'll try to make that happen this year," Venus said.

Hampered by injuries in 2009, she wore a strap around her right thigh against Cirstea but moved well.

"I looked solid out there, so presumably I was OK," Williams said.

Both sets followed similar patterns, with Williams losing serve early and finishing strong. She swept the final four games of the first set and the last three games of the match.

"I haven't played in a few weeks," she said. "It just took a few games to kind of get some rhythm going and kind of really getting energy flowing. Toward the end my game got better and better, and I was happy with it."

Williams won her 11th match in a row. She's playing for the final time since February, when she earned titles at Dubai and Acapulco.

Former No. 1 Ana Ivanovic beat Pauline Parmentier 6-4, 6-3 and said her career is moving in the right direction again. With the victory she broke a four-match losing streak, the longest of her career.

"I'm feeling really good at the moment," Ivanovic said. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, so I believe in that."

Top-seeded Svetlana Kuznetsova struggled in her opening match to beat Shuai Peng 6-2, 3-6, 6-4. Kuznetsova, the 2006 champion, next plays No. 27 Agnes Szavay, who shut out Alicia Molik 6-0, 6-0.

No. 8 Li Na lost to Timea Bacsinszky 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (3). No. 10 Flavia Pennetta was beaten by Andrea Petkovic 6-3, 3-6, 6-0.

Dasti resigns as MP

AFP, Islamabad

A parliamentarian known for his fierce criticism of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) was forced to resign on Thursday on charges of faking an educational degree.

Jamshed Dasti will also lose his spot as chairman of the National Assembly's standing committee on sports, a platform from which he repeatedly called for the sacking of PCB chairman Ijaz Butt.

"Dasti has been declared ineligible and the election commission is ordered to issue a notification in this regard within the next three days," said a Supreme Court order.

The six-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled Thursday after hearing a case filed against Dasti alleging that he faked a degree in Islamic studies.

"You brought disgrace to the entire house of the National Assembly and cannot represent the constituency," one of the judges said in his remarks.

Dasti confirmed his resignation to reporters outside the Supreme Court.

He hit the headlines last year when he accused the Pakistan national cricket team of match-fixing during the Champions Trophy held in South Africa.

His remarks -- which he later said were taken "out of context" -- forced then-captain Younus Khan to resign, a decision he later rescinded on the request of PCB chairman Butt.

Independence Day sports

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

The Independence Day sports competition was held at the Banijhuri playground in Ghor Upazila yesterday.

Near about 200 male and female members took part in 35 events of the competition, organised by Baratha Uttaran Sangha.

Saddam Hossain became champion in the competition. Police Superintendent Sheikh Muhammad Maruf Hasan distributed prizes among the winners as chief guest.

BDR champs in Independence Cup handball

SPORTS REPORTS

Bangladesh Rifles became champions while Bangladesh Police became runners up in the Independence Cup Handball Tournament 2010 at the Handball Stadium yesterday. Police beat Ansar by 59-14 points in the first match while Rifles beat BHF 30-21 in the second match. Mahub of Bangladesh Police was adjudged man of the tournament.

Kazi Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, senior vice president of Bangladesh Handball Federation handed over the prizes after the tournament.

Kuznetsova, Federer through in Miami

Tennis

AFP, Miami

Svetlana Kuznetsova had to give herself a stern talking-to as she made an opening-round escape at the Miami WTA event Thursday, defeating China's Peng Shuai 6-2, 3-6, 6-4.

Double grand slam winner Kuznetsova admitted she badly needed a chat -- in her native Russian -- as Peng pulled out the second set after dropping the first.

It eventually took a solid effort from the top seed to move through to the third round.

"When you get frustrated you get very mad and sometimes you don't have to let yourself get mad. I think I gave her chance to play well," said the 2006 Miami winner.

Kuznetsova's harsh advice to herself appeared to work in the end.

"The first set was very easy, and I just get frustrated a little bit. I stopped moving my feet in the second set and just lost one game and everything's went wrong."

"In tennis, you don't need much." Peng has just returned from a bout of appendicitis, which forced her out of Pattaya City and Dubai last month. The Chinese has lost her last 12 matches against top-five players.

Former French Open champion Ana Ivanovic won for the first time since January, defeating France's Pauline Parmentier 6-4, 6-3.

The Serbian, who stood number one after lifting the 2008 Roland Garros trophy, has suffered as her game hit the skids following that career high point.

The current world number 58 has gone through numerous coaching permutations in search of the form that took her to the summit.

"I thought I played really well. It was good to have a win," she said.

"I've improved a lot over last month. Obviously

On the men's side, lucky loser Nicolas Lapentti and qualifier Kevin Anderson were among those reaching the third round. The 33-year-old Lapentti, who made the draw only because another player pulled out, will face No. 1 Roger Federer on Saturday night.

Since Ivanovic won the French Open in 2008 at age 20, she has been slowed by injuries, most recently a sore shoulder, and a loss of confidence. She's ranked 58th this week and out of the top 50 for the first time in five years.

Ivanovic recently hired Steffi Graf's old coach, Heinrich Günthardt, and said she senses a turnaround in the past month.

"With Heinz, I can see the improvements actually almost on daily basis. It's very encouraging," Ivanovic said. "Now I'm surrounded with really good people. I'm very excited and motivated to play again and to get to the top."

"I just have to keep that in mind and learn from what happened and not dwell about it and not live in the past just take positives and take that it has happened, and just perform and play like it's a new me."

She beat Parmentier despite some ragged moments, with 15 winners, 31 unforced errors and seven double faults. Parmentier hit only six winners while committing 23 unforced errors.

Ivanovic received a first-round bye because she's seeded 25th. She'll next play No. 6 Agnieszka Radwanska, who beat Ekaterina Makarova 7-5, 6-0.

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"I felt like I've been playing really well for a while now, so it was disappointing to lose so early at Indian Wells. But I just keep working hard and try to do my best out there."

Sixth seed Agnieszka Radwanska beat Ekaterina Makarova, but Swiss Timea Bacsinszky stunned Australian Open semifinalist Li Na of China, seeded eighth, 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3).

In the men's ATP Masters draw, Roger Federer turned the disappointment of a third-round exit last week at Indian Wells into a benefit, saying the unexpected time off was just what he needed before Miami.

World number one Federer won event in 2005 and 2006 but smashed a racket in a rare flare of temper here a year ago as he lost a semifinal to Novak Djokovic.

His defeat last week in the Indian Wells third round at the hands of Cypriot Marcos Baghdatis was also a shock to the system, but the Swiss star said he was able to decompress as he made the move from California to Florida.

"I've had many years where I run from one thing to the next that also I welcome having all of a sudden more days off, more days of practise, more days where I can just wake up and see what I really want to do instead of having the perfect plan the whole time," Federer said.

"It's nice to adjust that for a change, if there's anything positive to take out of a loss."

ATP first-round play began as non-seeds took to the court.

Australian Peter Luczak earned an opening victory over Spain's Oscar Hernandez 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

Other men's winners at the nine million-dollar hardcourt event included South African Kevin Anderson, Horacio Zeballos of Argentina and Israeli Dudi Sela.

I've been poor: Gerrard

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard admits he has been playing well below his best this season.

Gerrard has struggled to hit the heights for much of the season and his underwhelming performances have been reflected in Liverpool's spluttering campaign.

The Reds failed to reach the Champions League knock-out stages and never threatened to make a run for the Premier League title.

Now Rafa Benitez's side face a major battle just to finish fourth and claim a place in next season's Champions League.

But Gerrard insists he still has plenty to play for as he tries to rediscover his peak form.

The England midfielder wants to win the Europa League with Liverpool - his side face Benfica in the last eight - and then go on to enjoy a success World Cup in South Africa later this year.

"I think it can be better, if you look at my form through the season as a whole I am not totally happy, I have not reached the level I would like to

beat," he told Sky Sports News.

"It is not worrying me as I still have confidence that it can switch and turn at any given time to where I would want it to be at any given time, I have played well this season but I have come out of games when I have not been totally happy."

"I am my own worst critic. I know myself when it is good and when it needs to be stepped up and the challenge for me now in the remaining games is to step up and drive Liverpool into fourth, try to go to the Europa League final and go to the World Cup."

Gerrard, now England vice-captain, believes Fabio Capello's men will travel to South Africa as strong contenders for the World Cup, but he admits the team still need to improve to win the trophy for the first time since 1966.

"Time will tell, we are in a good situation - we are winning and confidence is high but we have learning to do and some improving to do if we are to go all the way," he said.

"You need that bit of luck to keep players fit and the squad healthy - so we are in a good situation at this time but there is still a long way to the World Cup, a lot can happen."



The victorious Bangladesh Rifles team pose with the trophy after beating Bangladesh Police in the Independence Cup final at the newly-built Handball Stadium yesterday.