

Rice out of C'wealth Games

AFP, Irvine

Australia's triple Olympic gold medalist Stephanie Rice will have shoulder surgery and miss the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in October, the emotional swimmer said Thursday.

Rice, in California to compete in the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, said she could no longer swim through the pain caused by inflammation in her right shoulder and would have surgery, probably within a fortnight.

"Obviously it's a big disappointment to me," said Rice, whose week at the PanPacs is also done. "I have to think about the bigger picture, and that's definitely London 2012."

The 22-year-old, who won Olympic gold in Beijing in the 200m and 400m individual medleys and in the 4x200m freestyle relay, was the highest profile member of the 48-strong squad named by Australia in March at the conclusion of their national championships.

But she has battled pain in her shoulder that has hindered her training.

Daley cleared for Youth Games

AFP, Singapore

Britain's world champion diver Tom Daley was cleared to compete in the inaugural Youth Olympics on Friday after recovering from a triceps injury.

The 16-year-old, who was a shock winner of the men's 10m platform event at the world championships in Rome last year, pulled out of the European championships last weekend and his participation in Singapore was in doubt.

"Team GB diving athlete Tom Daley intends to compete in the Youth Olympic Games 3m springboard competition on Sunday," the British Olympic Association said in a statement.

"Daley, however, will not compete in the 10m platform competition, largely as a precaution as he continues to recover from a triceps injury suffered earlier this month during the European aquatics championships."

Daley is one of the highest-profile competitors in Singapore, which features athletes aged 14 to 18.

Bollinger feeling no pressure

AFP, Sydney

Paceman Doug Bollinger says skipper Ricky Ponting's claim that Australia could sweep this year's Ashes series 5-0 has not heaped extra pressure on the team to beat England, reports said Friday.

Ponting's belief that routing England was "absolutely possible" riled the England team with batsman Jonathan Trott replying: "If I said that I would probably find it puts pressure on me and the team."

But Bollinger, who is vying with Mitchell Johnson, Ben Hilfenhaus and Ryan Harris to lead Australia's new-ball attack in the November-January Ashes series, said Ponting's assertion would not hinder the Australians.

"I don't think so, I think that is exciting," Bollinger told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"That is the benchmark we can set ourselves and if we can achieve that it would be brilliant."

"Winning 5-0, especially at home, you wouldn't see me for a couple of weeks, that would be awesome."

Although England have defeated Australia in Test, one-day and Twenty20 matches in the past year, Bollinger added to the pre-Ashes mind games.

"They are confident because they have been winning every game. What team wouldn't be confident?" he said.

"But I'm not worried. We have just as good players -- if not better players than they do."

Meanwhile, senior batsman Simon Katich said he was unconcerned that half of Australia's likely top order batting line-up against England will be aged 35.

Ponting will be just a month shy of 36 when the first Test against England begins at Brisbane's Gabba in late November while Mike Hussey turned 35 in May.



Alyson Felix of the United States runs for the finish line to win the women's 400m race at the Diamond League Weltklasse athletics meeting in Zurich on Thursday.

Top guns all thru'

Tennis

AFP, Cincinnati

World number one Rafael Nadal saved a match point and rallied to defeat France's Julien Benneteau 5-7, 7-6 (8/6), 6-2 to reach the quarterfinals of the three million-dollar ATP Cincinnati Masters.

The reigning Wimbledon and French Open champion from Spain won for the 36th time in his past 38 matches but was on the verge of being ousted in the tie-breaker before fighting back.

"A match like this gives me a lot of confidence," Nadal said. "It's important for everything. A match point? Yeah. I am doing this well. I am playing aggressive. But I need to do better the next few days."

Nadal reached a quarterfinal against Cypriot Marcos Baghdatis, who upset Czech seventh seed Tomas Berdych 7-5, 6-4.

"He's a very tough player," Nadal said of Baghdatis. "It will be a very good match."

World number two Roger Federer, fourth-ranked Briton Andy Murray and Serbian second seed Novak Djokovic also advanced with triumphs Thursday.

The four top seeds reached the semifinals last week at Toronto, a feat that could be repeated in Cincinnati.

Nadal was given all he could handle by Benneteau, who broke Nadal twice to take the first set and nearly stopped the Spaniard in the 12th game of the second set before the top seed reached the tie-breaker.

Nadal jumped to a 4-1 lead but a pair of aces by Benneteau gave the Frenchman a match point at 6-5. Nadal won the next three points to force a third set, prompting both men to seek help from the trainer -- Nadal for tape on his right foot and Benneteau for combat cramping.

Benneteau suffered a left leg cramp again two points into the third set, surrendered a break at love and sought treatment only to learn he had to wait for another changeover. By then it was 3-0 for Nadal.

Nadal surrendered a break in the next game but broke back to 4-1 and held from there to finish off the test after two hours and 48 minutes when Benneteau sent a backhand beyond the baseline.

"It wasn't easy for sure," Nadal said. "Julien played a good match. At the beginning he played at a high level. I made a few mistakes. I have to keep improving."

Defending champion Federer had the easiest day, reaching the final eight by walkover when Germany's Philipp Kohlschreiber pulled out of their scheduled third-round match with a right shoulder injury.

The 16-time Grand Slam champion from Switzerland has not yet finished a set in the three million-dollar hardcourt event after a first-round bye and a 5-2 lead when Uzbek qualifier Denis Istomin retired with an injury Wednesday.

Federer will next meet Russian sixth seed Nikolay Davydenko, who beat Spain's David Ferrer 4-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Third-ranked Djokovic defeated Argentina's David Nalbandian 6-1, 7-6 (9/7) and will next face American Andy Roddick, who outlasted Swedish fifth seed Robin Soderling 6-4, 6-7 (9/7), 7-6 (7/5).

Nalbandian, who won two weeks ago at Washington, double-faulted on match point to hand Djokovic the victory and suffer just his second loss in 11 tie-breakers this year.

Murray advanced by outlasting Latvia's Ernests Gulbis 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

The 23-year-old Scotsman won six of nine break-point chances and made only 23 unforced errors while benefiting from 54 from Gulbis in booking a spot in the final eight.

"I was struggling a little bit but I managed to save it," Murray said. "I hung in there well. He had chances in the second set. I was struggling with my legs a little bit in the third set. I was tired but I hung in there."

Murray, who won on his fourth match point after seizing a 6-1 lead in the tie-breaker, will next face American Mardy Fish, who ousted Frenchman Richard Gasquet 7-5, 6-2.

"He plays aggressive tennis," Murray said of Fish. "I will have to hit my passing shots and take advantage of my opportunities."

Murray is coming off a title last week at Toronto, where he beat Nadal and Federer in the last rounds, becoming only the fifth man to oust both on his way to a title.

Murray improved to 6-10 in tie-breakers for the year and dropped Gulbis to 11-5, but what looked to be an easy tie-break romp proved tougher by the end, which came after two hours and 33 minutes.

Gulbis netted a forehand to give Murray a 3-0 lead and sent an overhead smash into the net to hand the Scotsman a 4-1 lead on the way to dropping six of the first seven points.

The Latvian pulled back three match points before sending a forehand long to give Murray the victory despite hitting 49 winners to only 22 for the Briton.

Lochte adds more gold

Swimming

AFP, Irvine, California

Ryan Lochte piled up more gold at the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships Thursday, winning the 400m individual medley in dominant style and anchoring the victorious US 4x100m freestyle relay.

Lochte opened his medley with a blistering butterfly leg that put him under world record pace, and seized the gold with a time of 4min 07.59sec.

That was the fastest in the world this year -- improving on the 4:08.77 he set in the heats when he and Tyler Clary nabbed the top two qualifying spots to squeeze world record-holder Michael Phelps out of the final.

Phelps' preliminary time was fourth-quickest, but only two swimmers from each country can compete in each final, so Phelps made do with relay duty on Thursday evening.

Phelps put the United States in front leading off the relay and they never relinquished the advantage.

Phelps, Peter Vanderkaay, Ricky Berens and Lochte won in 7:03:84 -- 7.17 seconds ahead of runners-up Japan with Australia third.

Clary was second in 4:09.55 and Thiago Pereira of Brazil was third in 4:12.09.

Kosuke Kitajima and Junya Koga claimed gold for Japan, Kitajima comfortably winning the 100m breaststroke and Koga parlaying a stellar start into a victory in the 50m backstroke.

Japan's quadruple Olympic gold medalist Kosuke Kitajima won the 100m breaststroke in 59.35sec.

He couldn't better his heats time of 59.04, but was more than satisfied to get the win ahead of Australia's Christian Sprenger and American Mark Gangloff.

"I'm happy that I won," he said. "I didn't win the Japan title at nationals, so I'm really happy."

World record-holder Brenton Rickard of Australia was fifth. After his strong morning swim, Kitajima said, his American coach Dave Salo suggested he should make a run at Rickard's world mark of 58.58.

But Kitajima, coming back this season from a sabbatical year, said it wasn't on the cards.

Felix bags brace of diamonds

Athletics

AFP, Zurich

American sprint star Allyson Felix cruised to victory in the 400m at the penultimate meet in the IAAF's Diamond League in Zurich on Thursday to ensure she bagged a brace of trophies.

Having already wrapped up the 200m, in which she is a three-time world champion, Felix timed 50.37 seconds, a gutsy final 30m seeing her past closest rivals Debbie Dunn and African champion Amantle Montsho of Botswana.

"The whole Diamond League season was amazing, pretty cool," said Felix. "But I must admit I had to work hard in the last 100m for that win."

"I still feel like a 200 and 400m runner and it will stay like that for 2011."

Felix's triumph was the highlight of a great night for a further six US athletes who scooped Diamond Trophies and 40,000 dollars apiece for dominating their events.

On the track, Wallace Spearmon and Jeremy Wariner won the men's 200 and 400m, David Oliver the 110m hurdles and Carmelita Jeter the women's 100m.

There was further success for the United States in the field, Dwight Phillips and Brittney Reese winning the men and

women's long jump events respectively. Spearmon ran a blistering 19.79sec to claim the 200m title, while Oliver dipped under 13sec for the fourth time this season in the hurdles, clocking 12.93sec despite falling over the line.

"This race was really good," said Spearmon. "I felt technically that I am running well. I'm the first to win the 200m Diamond Trophy so it is very special."

Wariner was in imperious form over the one lap, cruising to a world lead of 44.13sec with a fantastic kick down the homestretch to get past Jamaica's Jermaine Gonzalez.

Jeter was already assured of finishing atop the standings in the women's 100m, but had to be content with second place behind Jamaican Veronica Campbell-Brown in a photo-finish at 10.89sec.

In the field, Phillips long jumped a best of 8.20m, his closet rival Fabrice Lapierre of Australia remarkably failing to register a single jump in six attempts.

Phillips' teammate Reese, the women's world indoor and outdoor champion, claimed her bonus after dominating the in-form Darya Klshina, jumping a best of 6.89m to the Russian's 6.67.

Elsewhere, Jamaican Kaliese Spencer, in the absence of the injured Lashinda Demus, claimed the women's 400m hurdles crown, timing a personal best of 53.33sec in the process of victory.

Kenya's Paul Kipsiele Koech ensured his diamond trophy despite finishing more than three seconds behind compatriot Ezekiel Kemboi.

Koech's most dangerous rival, Olympic champion Brimin Kiprop Kipruto, only managed seventh.

"I was aware that if Kipruto was not around a second place would be enough to win the Diamond," admitted Koech.

Koech's compatriot Nancy Lagat had a straightforward victory in 4:01.01 in the women's 1500m, an event which she has dominated all season.

The men's 5000m crown was claimed by Ethiopian Imane Merga, who finished second behind compatriot Tariku Bekele (12:55.03).

It was a similar story for Poland's Piotr Malachowski, whose second spot in the discus behind German Robert Harting (68.64m) saw him go home happy.

Russian Ivan Ukhov claimed the men's high jump title, a best of 2.29m seeing off American Jesse Williams, while Brazil's Fabien Murer, the world indoor champion, won the women's pole vault title, a best of 4.81m enough to dispel the threat of Russian Svetlana Feofanova (4.71).

World record holder Barbra Spotakova of the Czech Republic did enough with her second placing (65.34m) behind German Christina Obergfoll (67.31) to win the javelin trophy.

'We must mend batting'

AFP, Sydney

Opening batsman Simon Katich said Friday Australia still has weaknesses in its batting three months ahead of the Ashes Test opener with England.

Australian batting collapses at the second Lord's Test and the fifth Oval Test lost Ricky Ponting's team the Ashes urn last year, and Katich remains concerned that the pattern has been repeated in subsequent series.

The Australians were skittled out for low scores against West Indies (150) in Perth last year, then against Pakistan (127) in Sydney in January and most recently in July for 88, again by a Pakistani attack at Headingley.

Katich said the problem would linger until the Australian top six batsmen stood up fully to Test-match pressure.

"Being brutally honest, it's still been a problem because it's happened a couple of times since the Ashes last year," Katich told Australian Associated Press.

"Until we can actually rectify that in a match that's going to be still hanging over our heads, and unfortunately you can't replicate it in the nets."

"As much as you try, it's got to happen in Test matches when the pressure is on and there's big crowds there, which is no doubt going to happen during the Ashes this year."

Katich said it was vital to keep the Australian team settled ahead of the first Ashes Test, starting at Brisbane's Gabba ground on November 25.

"Once you string games together if you're playing well, once everyone's playing their roles, there's no doubt it helps the consistency of the team," he said.

Lofty goal

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The former Bangladesh international, however, said that they are taking part in the Borden Trophy to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the squad.

Abahani will play in quarterfinals directly in the meet where they were eliminated from the semifinals in 2007.

Semenya back in Berlin

Athletics

AFP, Berlin

A year after her controversial victory, world 800m champion Caster Semenya will be back at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on Sunday as she rebuilds her career after her sextest ordeal.

Semenya has been at the centre of a storm ever since she won the world title last August in Berlin in a personal best time, but will be taking part in Sunday's IAAF World Challenge in Germany's capital.

Controversy has surrounded Semenya since she became world champion, but was then barred from running soon after as the world governing body ordered a sex test and enquiry into her unusually high levels of testosterone.

Last month, she was given the all-clear to resume her career with her first major test set to come at October's Commonwealth Games in India.

She has only been allowed to compete since July 6 and after returning in Finland with times of two minutes 04.22 seconds and 2:02.41, she hopes to keep improving in Berlin.

"I have now run at two meets in Finland and won them both," she said.

"But I cannot be completely satisfied with my times."

"Still, after 11 really hard months in which

I've been through a lot, I'm looking forward to being on the track once again.

"Now I have to see to it that I really run good races, so as to pick up the thread of my earlier achievements -- maybe this time in Berlin."

Her main rivals over the 800m will be Lenka Masna of the Czech Republic and Elisa Cusma of Italy.

Despite not being part of the IAAF's Diamond League programme, the Berlin event has still attracted several world champions in Polish hammer-throw Anita Wlodarczyk, Germany's discus-giant Robert Harting and Semenya.

Germany's European champion Verena Sailer will have a tough battle in the 100m against Kelly Ann Baptiste of Trinidad, Sherone Simpson of Jamaica, France's Christina Arron and Debbie Ferguson of the Bahamas, who have all run under 11 seconds.

Local heroine Ariane Friedrich is set to be up against her arch-rival and world champion Blanka Vlasic in the women's high jump after the German took bronze while Croatia's Vlasic won gold at the European Championships.

In the men's pole-vault, Australia's world champion Steven Hooker will be competing against German rivals Malte Mohr and Raphael Holzdeppe.

World indoor champion Lolo Jones of the United States will be the name to beat in the women's 100 metre hurdles.

Kim in Montreal qrts

Tennis

AFP, Montreal

Reigning US Open champion Kim Clijsters cruised into the quarterfinals of the two million-dollar WTA Montreal Cup on Thursday by defeating Estonia's Kaia Kanepi 6-2, 6-1.

The Belgian fifth seed, who won her third title of the year last week at Cincinnati, took just 55 minutes to reach a quarterfinal Friday against Russian eighth seed Vera Zvonareva, who beat Hungary's Agnes Szavay 6-3, 6-3.

One night after a three-set battle with American Bethanie Mattek-Sands in her first match since a three-set Cincinnati final against Maria Sharapova, Clijsters was pleased she advanced with relative ease.

"I was playing an opponent who could not miss a shot while today Kanepi was missing a lot, especially since her strengths are usually her serve and her backhand," Clijsters said.

"I really felt that I had opportunities once I was in a rally with her and she was either going to make a mistake or I could really try to make her move."

"It's always nice to win a tournament and gradually feel your level improve and also to have a match like (Mattek-Sands) and in Cincinnati -- to be behind and fight back and win."

Zvonareva took her only career victory over Clijsters at this year's Wimbledon quarterfinals.

"We always had tough matches," Zvonareva said. "I never managed to beat her and finally at Wimbledon I was able to play consistently. I



Kim Clijsters of Belgium signs autographs during the Rogers Cup at Stade Uniprix in Montreal on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP