

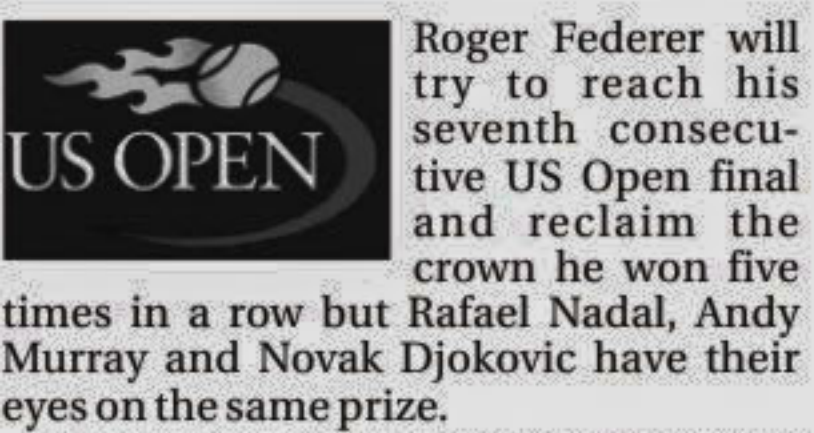


Defending champion Kim Clijsters (L) of Belgium and referee Brian Earley participate in the US Open draw ceremony at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City on Thursday.

US OPEN DRAW

**Nadal, Murray in same half**

AFP, New York



Roger Federer will try to reach his seventh consecutive US Open final and reclaim the crown he won five times in a row but Rafael Nadal, Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic have their eyes on the same prize.

The Flushing Meadows fortnight begins Monday with 16-time Grand Slam winner Federer seeking a 64th career title after his five-year US Open reign was ended last year by Juan Martin del Potro, who cannot defend his crown due to injury.

Wimbledon and French Open champion Nadal, who owns eight Slam titles, is the top seed followed by reigning Australian Open champion Federer, Serbian third seed Djokovic and British fourth seed Murray, seeking his first Slam title.

"I guess the top four have the best shot again," Federer said. "We can all play really well on the hardcourts. Murray has proven himself. So has Djokovic on the hardcourts and so has Rafa."

Nadal will try to become the seventh man to complete the career Grand Slam by capturing his first US Open title. He has stumbled in the semifinals each of the

past two years, by Murray in 2008 and Del Potro last year.

"Every year is different," Nadal said. "You can be playing very well, and you can arrive there and lose. You can be playing bad and start the tournament slow, better and better every day, and you can finish playing your best tennis and win. You never know."

Federer knows enough to know that he could see the Spaniard in the US Open final, the only Grand Slam singles championship match where they have not met.

"He has won the Australian Open. Maybe the US Open is a bit faster, so you figure Rafa will struggle a bit more," Federer said. "But if the draw goes his way, he'll be in the final and have a crack at the title, too."

"He knows how to win Slams. He's won all the other ones."

Nadal is 14-7 against Federer after winning six of their past seven meetings. They are 3-3 against each other on hardcourts.

"We get excited when we play each other, but I don't think we miss each other when we don't," Federer said.

"We've had that many matches against each other, and the matches are tough and grueling on both of us. There's a huge hype around it, which is also a bit

exhausting at times."

Murray, who was drawn into Nadal's half of the bracket, proved he can handle anything either of the two top seeds can produce, becoming only the fifth man to beat Nadal and Federer in the same event to take the Toronto title.

"Winning a tournament is always great, but it's the first time I beat Roger and Rafa in the same tournament, which is probably the most pleasing thing, and then didn't drop a set against either of them," Murray said.

Murray had not won a title all year until his victory in the US Open tuneup event, serving notice that he has what it takes for a Grand Slam breakthrough in New York.

"Murray didn't win a tournament for a long time, and he was able to win Toronto again, so that definitely puts him as one of the favourites as well," Federer said.

Federer could see Djokovic in the semifinals for the second year in a row after struggling past the Serb 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, 7-5 last year. Federer is 10-5 lifetime against Djokovic.

Djokovic could spoil Federer's title bid and Nadal's career Slam hopes as well. While the Spaniard owns a 14-7 career edge over Djokovic, the Serb has won their past three meetings, all last year on hardcourts.

Crying for

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though both of ad-hoc and elected committees consist of all kinds of bad and good organisers," said Asaduzzaman Kohinor, who was retained as ad-hoc committee general secretary of the handball federation last month.

"Obviously, I also want the election but not a faulty election. We will take steps in line with NSC's directions," said tennis federation's ad-hoc committee general secretary Istiaque Ahmed Curren.

When contacted, NSC secretary Shafique Anwar declined to comment anything regarding the election, saying that he is in training for two weeks outside the office.

According to the organisers' different versions, it is clear that they are worried over influence of the district organisers during elections and urged the government to develop a unique constitution like the one followed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) where the posts for district organisers and club organisers are defined.

It has been learnt but no one could confirm that the government would hold election for the national federations once they reform the committees at the District Sports Associations.

Inter get

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in the mix, and the last of this quartet Arsenal were put in Group H.

The Gunners face a long trip to Ukraine to play Shakhtar Donetsk, and will also tackle Sporting Braga and Partizan Belgrade.

The rules of the draw are such that none of the English sides can play each other before the quarterfinals.

The first round of group games will take place on September 14 and 15, with the final taking place at Wembley on May 28/29.

English bookmakers make a Spanish team 11-10 favourites to lift the trophy with an English side next best in the betting at 2-1.

An all-Spanish final is rated a 7-2 chance, and all-English final 11-2 and an all-Italian finale 33-1.

**KP seeks to regain confidence**



AFP, London

Kevin Pietersen has admitted his morale has been "hammered" by his failure to score a Test century in the last year-and-a-half.

Pietersen has not reached three figures at Test level since March 2009 during a run spree against the West Indies that led to seven centuries.

Heading into the fourth and final Test against Pakistan -- England's last before they defend the Ashes in Australia -- the 30-year-old South Africa born batsman had gone 25 innings without a Test hundred.

Pietersen said the problem was more psychological than technical, attributing the roots of his slump to his acrimonious removal as England captain in January 2009 in a row that saw Peter Moores sacked as coach.

"I'm not one of those guys who likes to say I'm playing well in the nets. Talk is cheap, but I'm trying so, so hard to break this barren run of hundreds," Pietersen told Sky Sports.

"It does concern me. I'm always looking to try and improve. I've got to look at the positives and drag my confidence up, which has been hammered in the last 18 months."

"I'm nowhere near the person I used to be but I've got to keep trying to work at it."

"I've got a hell of a lot of starts and a hell of a lot of 80s and 90s. I was thinking if I'd converted those I'd have four hundreds in the Test year which is what I usually get."

"It's purely down to confidence and purely down to what's happened over the last 18 months. I'm trying so hard every day to get back to where I used to be. I'll get there."

Pietersen is due in next after England ended the first day of the fourth Test against Pakistan on 39 for one, a combination of rain and bad light

meaning fewer than 13 overs were bowled Thursday.

England batting coach Graham Gooch, who has worked closely with Pietersen, told reporters at Lord's after stumps: "Three weeks ago, I spent a week of practice with him here (Lord's) and he works tremendously hard at his game."

"The way he shapes up in preparation, you couldn't fault that," added former England captain and opening batsman Gooch.

"It's the same as he would approach a match and that's the right way."

"But when you are out there, the way you manage your batting, the way your mind works, is down to the individual."

"In these (overcast) conditions we've had, you have to make runs. You've got to work really hard," explained the 57-year-old Gooch who in his 118 Tests scored 8,900 runs, including 20 hundreds, at an average of 42.58.

"He's working away, he's not found the scores he wants. But the 80 he scored at Edgbaston (in the second Test) enabled England to win that match."

England have asked Hampshire to play Pietersen in a couple of county fixtures this season but they refused after the South Africa-born batsman made it clear he'd be leaving at the end of the current campaign to move to a side nearer his London home.

"You get confidence from scoring runs in the middle. That is an important part of feeling good as a player," said Gooch, who spent all his county career with eastern side Essex.

"But the modern itinerary of international cricket doesn't quite allow the number of (opportunities for other) games that it did in the past."

"Kevin's situation with Hampshire is between him and them. But ideally, you'd like to be playing some sort of cricket at some stage -- because you need that rhythm."

Pietersen, for all his recent struggles, has still scored 5,306 runs, including 16 hundreds, in 65 Tests at an average of 48.23.

**India eye revenge**

FROM PAGE 17  
Gambhir, it has been left to the Virat Kohlis and Suresh Rainas to deliver for the team but they have let Dhoni down so far.

Schwag's individual performance cannot be counted upon to bail India out in every situation and it is important that the rest of the batsmen, including the attacking Yuvraj Singh find their feet.

But that would not be an easy task against the disciplined Lankan bowling which has discovered a deadly weapon in Perera.

Add to this the ever-reliable Lasith Malinga and Angelo Mathews and the Indian

batsmen may once again find the going tough.

Unlike the Indians, the Lankan batting line-up has a settled look with veterans Mahela Jayawardene, Sangakkara and the explosive Tillakaratne Dilshan in reasonably good form.

It remains to be seen how the Indian pace trio of Praveen Kumar, Ashish Nehra and Ishant Sharma contain the islanders this time after being given just 103 runs to defend in the demoralising league-stage defeat.

**SQUADS**  
INDIA: Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain), Virender

Schwag, Virat Kohli, Suresh Raina, Rohit Sharma, Yuvraj Singh, Ravindra Jadeja, Dinesh Karthik, R Ashwin, Praveen Kumar, Ishant Sharma, Abhimanyu Mithun, Ashish Nehra, Pragyan Ojha, Saurabh Tiwary, Munaf Patel

**SRI LANKA:** Kumar Sangakkara (captain), Mahela Jayawardene, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Dilhara Fernando, Rangana Herath, Suraj Randiv, Chamara Kapugedera, Nuwan Kulasekara, Lasith Malinga, Angelo Mathews, Ajantha Mendis, Thisara Perera, Thilan Samaraweera, Chamara Silva, Upul Tharanga

**City draw Juventus**

AFP, Monaco

Europa League holders Atletico Madrid will face German big guns Bayer Leverkusen while Liverpool meet Romania's Steau Bucharest following the draw for the group stage here on Friday.

Atletico, who beat Fulham in last year's final thanks to an extra time goal from Uruguay striker Diego Forlan, face an awkward Group B as not only must they take on Germany captain Michael Ballack's new team but they also come up against Norwegian side Rosenborg as well as Aris of Greece.

Liverpool are the most successful European side among the 48 teams contesting the group stages having won the Champions League five times and the UEFA Cup - precursor to the Europa League - three times, most recently in 2001.

Now coached by Roy Hodgson, who guided Fulham to last year's final, Liverpool will also have to overcome the 1989 UEFA Cup winners Napoli in Group K along with Dutch side Utrecht who thrashed Celtic 4-0 on Thursday to claim their place in the pot.

"We don't have to travel to Ukraine or Belarus - we've just been on a four and a half hour flight - so travel-wise could be

GROUPS		
<b>GROUP A</b> Juventus Manchester City Salzburg Lech Poznan	<b>GROUP E</b> AZ Alkmaar Dynamo Kiev BATE Borisov Sheriff Tiraspol	<b>GROUP I</b> PSV Eindhoven Sampdoria Metalist Kharkiv Debrecen
<b>GROUP B</b> Atletico Madrid Bayer Leverkusen Rosenborg Trondheim Aris Salonika	<b>GROUP F</b> CSKA Moscow Palermo Sparta Prague FC Lausanne-Sport	<b>GROUP J</b> Sevilla Paris St Germain Borussia Dortmund Karpaty Lviv
<b>GROUP C</b> Sporting Lille Levski Sofia Ghent	<b>GROUP G</b> Zenit St Petersburg Anderlecht AEK Athens Hajduk Split	<b>GROUP K</b> Liverpool Steaua Bucharest Napoli Utrecht
<b>GROUP D</b> Villarreal Club Bruges	<b>GROUP H</b> VfB Stuttgart Getafe	<b>GROUP L</b> Porto Besiktas

a lot worse," said Liverpool club secretary Ian Sylvester.

"I don't know too much about Utrecht but any team that beats Celtic 4-0 must be a decent side."

"We will treat all three opponents with respect - Steaua Bucharest were top of the seeds in the second pot so that will be difficult too."

Italian giants Juventus are another side with a rich European pedigree having won two Champions Leagues, three UEFA Cups and a Cup Winners Cup.

They were drawn in Group A alongside big spending English side Manchester City

whose sole European success came in the Cup Winners Cup back in 1970.

Austria's Salzburg and Poland's Lech Posnan make up the group.

Sevilla, two times winners of the UEFA Cup, will also have their work cut out to reach the knockout phase as they have been pitted against German side Borussia Dortmund, the French Cup winners Paris Saint Germain and Karpaty of the Ukraine.

"In Sevilla and PSG we have two tough opponents but when I look at some of the other groups, I reckon it could have been a lot worse," said Dortmund captain Sebastian Kehl.

Group G also offers some intriguing ties with the 2008 UEFA Cup winners Zenit St Petersburg up against Belgium's Anderlecht, the 1983 winners, Greek side AEK Athens, who put out Dundee United on Thursday, and Croatia's Hajduk Split.

The top two from each of the 12 groups progresses to the knockout stage where they will be joined by the third-placed teams from the eight Champions League groups in the round of 32.

The first round of group stages is on September 16 with the final being played in Dublin on May 18.

**Ex-BFF president passes away**

SPORTS REPORTER

Former president of Bangladesh Football Federation and Inspector General of Bangladesh Police, noted sports organiser Abdur Rakib Khandker breathed his last on the 25th of this month at a hospital in Bangkok. He was 78. The deceased left behind 4 sons, two daughters, and countless well-wishers. His namaz-e-janaja will be held at the Gulshan Azad Mosque after Asr prayers today. BFF president Kazi Mohammad Saaluddin expressed his condolences at the death of his predecessor.

**Waqar, Afridi face off over Malik**



INTERNET

Trouble is brewing in the Pakistan cricket team as coach Waqar Younis is reportedly at loggerheads with ODI and Twenty20 captain Shahid Afridi and chief selector Mohsin Khan over the omission of Shoaib Malik and Umar Amin from the squad for the one-day series in England.

Reliable sources said that Waqar wanted Malik and Amin to be retained in the one-day squad and had disagreed with Mohsin and Afridi when they consulted him on phone while finalising the squad on Wednesday.

"Waqar felt that Pakistan needed Malik's experience for the one-day series and he would get back into form soon. While he also believes that Umar Amin is a great talent for the future and must be given confidence," one source said.

Malik played in three Tests in England and failed in them while Amin too came a cropper.

Both were dropped from the one-day squad by the selectors owing to poor form.

Afridi also said it was time for Pakistan to start preparing a nucleus of players for the 2011 World Cup.

The source said the chief selector had also questioned the need to have rookie left-arm spinner Reza Hasan for the Test matches when Pakistan had been playing the experienced spinner Abdul Rehman.

Incidentally, Pakistan's former coach Mudassar Nazar has also come out in favor of having Malik in the team despite the all-rounder's recent poor form.

Mudassar told a cricket website that Malik's omission came as a surprise to him.

"Shoaib Malik's omission has been rather surprising and is not justified. He has been a good one day player and should have been in the squad," he said.

**Oram out of Champions League**

CRICINFO

Allrounder Jacob Oram will have knee surgery next week that will rule him out of the Champions League Twenty20 in another painful chapter to a career plagued by injury. Scans showed damage to Oram's patella tendon and he is now hoping to return for Pakistan's visit in December. He has been replaced by the 18-year old allrounder Ben Wheeler, who played in the Under-19 World Cup this year.

It continues a tough year for Oram, who forfeited his IPL fee when he suffered a torn patella during the one-day series with Australia in March. He made it back for the World Twenty20 but continued to feel pain and aggravated the problem again during a squad camp in Australia last month.

New Zealand's team management hoped Oram would be able to get through the one-day tour of Sri Lanka but he was sent home this week. The surgery also hurts Central Districts, who have already lost Ross Taylor to Bangalore for the Twenty20 tournament in South Africa starting on September 10.

"While I'm gutted to miss the Champions League with the Stars I'm thankful the medical specialist has found the problem now so we can get the right plans in place to get it right," Oram, 32, said. "I've been told that I should be realistically targeting the Pakistan homes series at the end of the year, but who knows, if surgery and rehab goes well I may be available for selection before the Indian tour in November."

**Baghdatis beaten**



AP, New Haven

Sergiy Stakhovsky completed two matches on Thursday, but it was top-seed Marcos Baghdatis who looked tired, losing 5-7, 6-1, 7-6 (4) to the Ukrainian in the quarterfinals of the Pilot Pen tennis tournament.

Stakhovsky changed speeds throughout the match, and used slices and drop shots to keep Baghdatis running. In the end, it was the ninth seed

advancing to Friday's semifinals.

"I had to make a lot of sprints, you know," Baghdatis said. "I felt my legs a bit tired after. I couldn't be 100 per cent."

Stakhovsky was a bit tired too.

He had his first-round match on Tuesday suspended by darkness and finished that Wednesday, beating Peter Luzak 6-3, 7-6 (4). He started his third-round match Wednesday night against Spaniard Tommy Robredo, before that was suspended by



Sergiy Stakhovsky of the Ukraine reacts to a point against Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus in the Pilot Pen quarterfinals at the Connecticut Tennis Centre on Thursday.

rain in a first-set tiebreaker. Stakhovsky won the tiebreaker 7-5 when the match resumed Thursday morning and finished off the sixth seed in the second set, 6-2. He was back on the court against Baghdatis a few hours later.

"I would say I have a nice long streak here in tennis," he said. "I don't need a hotel. I could sleep in the lounge."

Stakhovsky will play Thiemo de Bakker Friday in the semifinals. Th Dutchman, whose ranking has moved this year from No. 96 to No. 52, beat Evgeny Korolev of Kazakhstan, 6-4, 6-2.

In the women's draw, three Russians played their way into the semifinals, while top-seeded Caroline Wozniacki advanced without ever taking the court.

Wozniacki's opponent in the quarterfinals, Italy's Flavia Pennetta, withdrew from the tournament with an injury to her right foot.

The Danish star will play Elena Dementieva in the semis. The fourth-seeded Russian needed almost three hours to beat Marion Bartoli of France 6-3, 3-6, 6-2. It was her second consecutive three-hour match after beating Kateryna Bondarenko on Wednesday 7-6 (4), 6-7 (5), 6-4.

In an all-Russian quarterfinal, Maria Kirilenko beat Dinara Safina in straight sets, 6-3, 6-3. Kirilenko said she's not surprised so many Russians are doing so well on the Tour.

She will play Nadia Petrova on Friday, who also advanced in straight sets, 6-2, 6-1 over Australian Samantha Stosur. Petrova had four aces and won 82 percent of her first-serve points.

The other men's semifinal Friday will have Denis Istomin of Uzbekistan playing Serbian Viktor Troicki.

Troicki beat Radek Stepanek of the Czech Republic 6-2, 6-3. Istomin needed three sets to get by Teymuraz Gabashvili of Russia 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (8).