

Trio to be heard in 40 days

REUTERS, Karachi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will convene a preliminary hearing into allegations of spot fixing against three Pakistani players in 40 days time, the legal adviser to the country's cricket board said on Tuesday.

Tafazzul Rizvi told this news agency that the players, Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer, had exercised their right to a preliminary hearing against their suspension over the scandal and filed responses.

The players had asked for a hearing to hear their point of view, Rizvi said. "The ICC will now convene a hearing in 40 days time."

The three players were suspended on September 4 by the ICC for their alleged involvement in spot-fixing during the fourth Test against England at Lords.

Team manager Yawar Saeed said earlier English police had delayed until Wednesday the questioning of a fourth player, fast bowler Wahab Riaz, over the scandal. Riaz was originally summoned by Scotland Yard for Tuesday but Saeed told Geo super channel the questioning had been delayed by one day.

"Wahab will be going on Wednesday as there was some prior commitment he had to deal with first," Saeed said, without elaborating.

Riaz, 25, a left-armed, claimed five wickets on his debut in the third Test against England and was a member of Pakistan's squad for the five-match one-day series, but he did not play in the first two.

London police have already interviewed Test captain Butt and pace bowlers Amir and Asif, who were suspended by the ICC over allegations they were involved in fixing incidents, such as no-balls, in a betting scam during the Test series.

The trio have returned to Pakistan but on the condition they would be available for police questioning when required.

Rizvi said the tour selection committee took the decision not to select Riaz for the one-day matches, denying it was a result of ICC or Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) pressure.

"He is available for selection as any other player in the touring squad," Rizvi said. England won the Test series 3-1 and are 2-0 up in the one-day matches.

Spanish media praise legend

AFP, Madrid

Spanish media on Tuesday hailed world number one tennis ace Rafael Nadal as a "legend" after he became only the seventh man in history to complete a coveted career Grand Slam.

Spain's largest circulation daily El Pais said the 24-year-old had entered the "restricted club of professionals" who have won the world's four main tennis tournaments -- the US, French and Australian Opens and Wimbledon.

"Nadal is among the legends of tennis," it declared. The left-hander achieved the feat after he defeated second-ranked Novak Djokovic on Monday 6-4, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2 at Flushing Meadows to capture his first US Open crown.

"Nadal enters into Olympia," wrote centre-right daily newspaper El Mundo, in a reference to the site of the Olympic Games in classical times.

Sports daily Marca said Nadal was simply "the best player in the world" who joined a list of prestigious players like John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors who "never won at his age" all the titles he already has under his belt.

Nadal's win adds to a list of successes for Spanish athletes this year following the country's first ever World Cup win in South Africa and Alberto Contador's third victory in the Tour de France.

"It is the golden age for Spanish sports," wrote Marca.

Hosts take

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competition, along with the first-round group winners, for a total of five countries. After a single round-robin, the top team will qualify for the tournament proper.

Top five teams from the last edition -- Japan, Korea Republic, DPR Korea, China and Australia -- have been given a direct entry into the finals.



Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic tries to come to terms with the US Open men's singles final defeat at Flushing Meadows on Monday. PHOTO: AFP

Beaten, but not down

REUTERS, New York

Novak Djokovic could not tame the fury of Rafael Nadal in New York on Monday but his return to his best form augurs well for Serbia as they prepare to host the Czech Republic in the Davis Cup semifinal this week.

Djokovic, back at number two in the world after his inspired run to the final at Flushing Meadows, will spearhead Serbia's challenge in Belgrade as they attempt to reach the final for the first time.

In the other semifinal in Lyon, Argentina will have to beat nine-times Davis Cup champions France for the first time if they are to reach the end-of-season showpiece -- their hopes resting heavily on the shoulders of a resurgent David Nalbandian.

France are without the injured Jo-Wilfried Tsonga while Argentina's 2009 US Open champion Juan Martin del Potro has been sidelined for almost the entire year with a wrist injury.

Fiercely patriotic, Djokovic will have to quickly re-charge for what promises to be a difficult task for the Serbs in the 17,000-capacity Belgrade Arena that will be packed to the rafters when the tie begins on Friday.

That raucous home support will help Djokovic who will still be feeling the effects of the effort he expended to beat Roger Federer in an epic five-set semifinal in New York before succumbing to Nadal in a rain-delayed title match late on Monday.

"It's hard to recuperate from the exertions of a grand slam then travel east to make up a six-hour time difference," Niki Pilic, who lead Croatia to the 2005 title and is now an advisor to the Serb team, told Serb media on Tuesday.

"Nevertheless we are confident that Novak will be up to the task because when you have the number two in the world in your team there is no Plan B. He is the backbone of the team."

Viktor Troicki, who almost beat Djokovic in the first round of the US Open, is expected to be Serbia's second singles player with world number three doubles player Nenad Zimonjic likely to partner Janko Tipsarevic in

Saturday's doubles.

Unlike Djokovic, Czech number one Tomas Berdych will have no worries about fatigue, having been ditched out of the US Open early.

The Wimbledon runner-up will share the singles workload with Radek Stepanek who said he is relishing the prospect of the fire-cracker atmosphere that will await the visitors in Belgrade.

"Playing them in Serbia will definitely be tough because their fans will be standing behind them," Stepanek told the Davis Cup website.

"They are playing in the World Group (semifinals) for the first time so definitely the people are pumped about it. But we have a great team and we believe in ourselves.

"We've been underdogs so many times, the same as we will be in Serbia, and we will try to use it to our advantage and do what we've done for the last two years."

Having beaten reigning champions Spain in the quarterfinals, France will be favourites to reach the final for the first time since 2002 when they lost to Russia in Bercy.

Team captain Guy Forget hopes Gael Monfils can step up in the absence of Tsonga while Gilles Simon or Richard Gasquet will probably fill the second singles spot, leaving Michael Llodra to provide the doubles expertise.

"The absence of Tsonga is not worrying me because at the US Open I saw Gael playing well and Richard coming back close to his best level," Forget said.

Argentina's team arrived in Lyon last Friday after the doubles duo of Horacio Zeballos and Eduardo Schwank lost in the US Open semifinals.

"It was a good idea to have landed several days earlier than usual," captain Modesto "Tito" Vazquez said. "The group are in good spirits."

Nalbandian, who was devastating in beating Nikolay Davydenko and Mikhail Youzhny in the 3-2 quarterfinal win over Russia, is expected to have shrugged off an ankle injury in time for Friday's start. Juan Monaco is Argentina's second singles pick having missed the wins over Sweden and Russia.

Who's the best?

Tennis

AFP, New York

Roger Federer is still widely regarded as being the best player of all time, but if the US Open is anything to go by, he may not remain so for much longer.

Rafael Nadal's sweeping title win in New York on Monday has re-opened the debate, just over a year after Federer assumed the best-ever mantle with back-to-back wins at the French Open and Wimbledon.

The win in Paris completed Federer's Grand Slam set while his triumph in London a few weeks later took him past the career record mark of 14 titles that Pete Sampras had set in 2002.

Federer then won the Australian Open in January to make it 16, but at 29 he is entering the veteran stage.

Nadal's win in New York made him the seventh man to win all four Grand Slam titles and he now has a total of nine. At just 24, he is in the prime of his career and is expected to win more.

The question is how many more. Asked after his 6-4, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2 win over Novak Djokovic in Monday's final, Nadal, true to form, was reticent to say anything that could be interpreted as disrespectful of Federer.

"I think talk about if I am better or worse than Roger is stupid, because the titles say he's much better than me, so that's true at that moment. I think will be the true all my life," he said.

"For me, always, always Roger was an example, especially because he improved his tennis I think during all his career, and that's a good thing that you can copy, no?"

"So I try to copy this, and I know Roger and me are different, much different styles. Being better than Roger I don't think it is the right moment to talk about that, because I don't think that."

For his part, Federer, who will drop to third in the world after his five-set semifinal loss in New York to Djokovic, is adamant that he is far from being a spent force at the Grand Slam level.

"It's normal, because you can't go through a 10- or 15- year career thinking you'll always be at the very top. I think I did incredible work staying so long in the top 2 in the world," he said.

me, and many times when I lose I feel like it's on my racquet.

"That's a good thing, you know. I wouldn't want to feel the way that I couldn't compete with the new generation, but I can. It's not a problem for me."

Perhaps the best-placed person to assess the situation is Djokovic, who has played them both many times over the last few years, culminating in his back-to-back matches with them in New York.

Asked to pass judgement shortly after his loss in the final to Nadal, he said: "We cannot judge who is better on one tournament.

"At this point there is five, six years' difference between them, and basically Federer had more years on the tour, he had more success; he has more trophies.

"He's definitely somebody who made history in this sport. He's still playing as one of the best players in the world.

"The other hand, you have Nadal who is just proving each day, each year that he's getting better. That's what's so frustrating, a little bit. He's getting better each time you play him.

"He's so mentally strong and dedicated to this sport. You know, he has all the capabilities, everything he needs, in order to be the biggest ever, my opinion.

"He has lots of time to come if he physically holds on the next five, six, seven years."

LEADING GRAND SLAM WINNERS

16 -- Roger Federer (SUI) 4 Australian, 6 Wimbledon, 1 French, 5 US

14 -- Pete Sampras (USA) 2 Australian, 7 Wimbledon, 5 US

12 -- Roy Emerson (AUS) 6 Australian, 2 French, 2 Wimbledon, 2 US

11 -- Bjorn Borg (SWE) 6 French, 5 Wimbledon

TEST AGAINST NZ India looking for a venue

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket chiefs were Tuesday searching for a venue to host a Test match against New Zealand in November after both Kolkata and Kanpur declined.

The second Test of the three-match series had been allotted to Kanpur, but the Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association backed out citing the non-availability of the government-owned Green Park stadium.

The Cricket Association of Bengal also refused an offer from the Indian board to hold the Test, saying Kolkata's Eden Gardens was being renovated for next year's World Cup.

"The renovation work would have to be stopped for some time if we accepted the proposal to host the Test," CAB official Chittrak Mitra said. "We need time to get the Eden Gardens ready for the World Cup."

National cricket board spokesman Rajiv Shukla said the venue for the Test would be finalised soon.

New Zealand are due to play three Tests and five one-day internationals during the six-week tour starting on October 31.

The first Test will be played in Ahmedabad from November 4 to 8 and the third in Nagpur over November 20-24.

Nagpur, the home of Indian board president Shashank Manohar, was added to the itinerary after Mumbai refused to hold a Test at the under-renovation Wankhede stadium.

The Wankhede is the venue for three World Cup matches, including the final on April 2. Eden Gardens is due to host four World Cup games.

Mani slams PCB again

Cricket

AFP, London

Ehsan Mani, the Pakistani former president of the International Cricket Council (ICC), has accused the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) of failing to educate its players about the dangers of corruption.

Pakistan's tour of Britain has been overshadowed by newspaper allegations of a betting scam that saw no-balls deliberately bowled in the fourth Test against England at Lord's last month.

The claims, published in the News of the World, led to the suspension of Pakistan Test captain Salman Butt and bowlers Mohammad Aamer and Mohammad Asif by the ICC.

Mani, in an interview with the October edition of the Wisden Cricketer magazine, said the PCB had to take its share of blame for the scandal.

"When players first come into the international game, they are given a one-to-one induction (by the ICC) on how they might be compromised," he said.

"But the Pakistan board is clearly not getting the message through to its players. The onus is on the PCB to explain how players under its control could behave like this."

Mani, who led the ICC, cricket's global governing body, from 2003-06, dismissed claims Pakistan players were among the most vulnerable to 'spot-fixing' approaches because they weren't as well-paid as rival international

cricketers. "All cricketers round the world get paid well," Mani said. "Even Pakistani players are exceedingly well paid relative to the standard of living in their country. There is no excuse (for corruption) apart from sheer greed."

"If a player comes from a very under-privileged background and makes the big time, he needs a lot of mentoring, a lot of support and education."

"We have to be honest -- there has been a failure in the system in Pakistan here and certainly Pakistan should be accountable to the ICC to explain how it's gone so wrong."

Mani added the time was now right for the ICC to approach the government in India, the global centre of illegal betting on cricket, to legalise gambling.

"The ACSU (the ICC's anti-corruption and security unit) works very closely with the book-makers in countries where gambling is legal."

"But in the grey markets, particularly India, where it is totally unregulated, the ACSU's intelligence can only ever be superficial."

"So this is the time for the ICC to say to the Indian government that you have to bring this into the loop... This is hurting the credibility not only of the game but of India and Pakistan."

Mani's comments were published on the same day as Haroon Lorgat, the ICC chief executive, speaking after a meeting of the ICC chief executives' committee in Cape Town, said Tuesday: "I am especially keen to engage with governments to consider the regulation of betting."

Nadal comes full

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prior matches against Nadal, all on hardcourts, but has still never defeated the Spaniard in a final or at a Grand Slam event.

Nadal improved to 9-2 in Slam finals, his only losses coming to Federer at Wimbledon in 2006 and 2007, and 15-7 lifetime against Djokovic, who could not combat the top seed's relentless performance.

After dropping a set for the first time in the tournament, Nadal responded with exceptional shotmaking in the third set, breaking Djokovic for a 2-1 lead when the Serb sent a forehand wide.

Djokovic fought off three break points in the fifth game and five more in an epic seventh game as each man fired impressive shots time and again, those who stayed through the rain giving both men a standing ovation after Djokovic held.

Nadal held twice more to claim the third set, forced Djokovic to save a break point to open the fourth set and then broke Djokovic in the third game, his forehand winner setting up a break that came when the Serb's forehand hit the net cord and landed beyond the baseline.

Djokovic netted a forehand to surrender a break that handed Nadal a 4-1 lead but the speedy Serb kept fighting and had a break chance in the sixth game, missing long with a forehand, before Nadal held to reach the brink of history.

Nadal swatted a forehand on the baseline to reach match point and the magical moment came after three hours and 43 minutes when Djokovic hit a forehand wide.

The Spaniard put his face in his hands and fell to the

ground on his back, then rolled over and savoured the moment. After receiving congratulations from Djokovic at the net, Nadal dropped to his knees on the court and raised his hands in victory.

Nadal fired a forehand winner to break Djokovic in the opening game of the match, but Djokovic answered by breaking back to 2-2, the Spaniard swatting a forehand wide to surrender his serve for only the third time in the tournament.

Djokovic, who will rise to second in the world rankings, denied Nadal on five break points in the fifth game but succumbed on the sixth, the Serb smashing his racket in anger after Nadal's serve-swiping winner.

Nadal held his serve from there to claim the first set, an ominous note for Djokovic as the Spanish star was 107-1 in prior Grand Slam matches when winning the first set and 91-0 when taking the first two sets.

His urgency aroused, Djokovic broke Nadal at love for a 3-1 lead in the second set but saw his lead erased in a pivotal seventh game, Nadal denying him on two game points then firing a forehand winner on his third break chance.

The second set was at 4-4 with Djokovic serving at 30-all after one hour and 41 minutes of play when rains returned to Arthur Ashe Stadium, halting the match for one hour and 48 minutes.

When play resumed, Djokovic battled through deuce three times before holding to 5-4, then broke Nadal to claim the second set, the Spaniard spraying a backhand wide and netting a forehand for his first lost set of the tournament.

Latif quits Pak job

AFP, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif resigned Tuesday as a coach at the national cricket academy over spot-fixing comments and said that he had taken up a new job with the Afghan team.

The former wicketkeeper-batsman resigned after authorities handed him notice over a statement he made about spot-fixing.

"This is to inform you all that after having discussions with the Afghan cricket authorities I have accepted their offer to become the head coach of the Afghan cricket team," he said.

Latif, who was until last month Afghanistan's batting coach, is taking over from fellow Pakistani Kabir Khan, who was coach until last month's tour of Scotland. He resigned over differences with the Afghan cricket authority.

Pakistani cricket has been rocked by an investigation against three of its top cricketers in Britain over the latest spot-fixing scandal.

Versatile Pont

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In 1987, Pont became the only modern professional cricketer to play in a professional baseball match when he started as a lead pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies, following trials with six Major League teams after clocking speeds around 100 mph.

He also has the second longest recorded throw of all time -- a mammoth 138 yards - set in Cape Town.

His specialised coaching method is known as ABSAT (Advanced Biomechanics Speed & Accuracy Technique). His book, The Fast Bowler's Bible, was published in 2006 by The Crowood Press and is in its third edition. His second book "Coaching Youth Cricket" was published in June.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Iodine-rich seaweed 5 Apple computer 8 Muscat's land 12 Enrages 13 Blond shade 14 Ill temper 15 Participate in a lake sport 17 - gin fizz 18 Debate topics 19 Cheated at hide-and-seek 21 Conk out 22 Reddish-brown gem 23 List-ending abbr. 26 Gist 28 Palatal pendant 31 So 33 In medias 35 Tend texts

Grid for crossword puzzle with numbers 1-35 indicating starting positions for words.

Solution time: 21 mins.

Grid for cryptogram puzzle with letters F, I, S, H, A, M, P, T, I, E, R, A, N, T, I, M, O, O, I, D, L, E, S, T, A, M, P, E, D, E, T, E, M, P, T, O, Y, O, N, E, W, C, L, A, S, S, A, N, D, W, O, L, F, O, W, I, N, G, B, A, N, D, A, N, A, R, O, O, D, B, U, G, E, L, A, N, B, O, U, R, B, O, N, W, E, E, P, Y, E, R, A, M, A, D, O, M, E, G, A, S, A, G, S, H, E, D, E, M, I, L, A, K, E, M, E, A, D, E, N, I, D, I, R, E, A, R, I, D, S, U, R, E, P, A, R, N, A, R, Y

CRYPTOQUIP

E I H G C Y P R W I S W G F X V W Y J B
H S F O F S I W S V E Y M P R H Y K B
K W M F K R F S , E B C O O W B F
K R H K ` X G F H I S W P J P W Y P F S K .

Yesterday's Cryptquip: I REALLY BELIEVE THAT IMPATIENT MOTORISTS HAVE TO CONSTANTLY DECIDE "TO BEEP OR NOT TO BEEP?" Today's Cryptquip Clue: K equals T