

Nadal, Monfils
in semis

AFP, Tokyo

World number one Rafael Nadal cruised through to the semifinals of the Japan Open Friday, joining Frenchman Gael Monfils, who saved a match point before overcoming American Andy Roddick.

The Spanish top seed, who completed a career Grand Slam by winning his first US Open crown last month, made quick work of his Russian opponent Dmitry Tursunov, reeling off the last six games in a row for a 6-4, 6-1 victory.

Guillermo Garcia-Lopez, who shocked Nadal in the Thailand Open semi-finals last weekend, failed to set up a rematch, losing to Viktor Troicki of Serbia 6-2, 3-6, 6-4.

In a hard-fought contest, French fifth seed Monfils trailed Roddick 5-6 in the final set tie-break before firing successive aces on his way to a 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) victory.

"It was a great match. Both of us played great tennis," said Monfils. "I came to the net more than usual."

The Frenchman took first blood in the contest, unleashing a backhand passing shot down the line when 5-5 in the first set tie-break and sealing the set when Roddick's backhand volley found the net.

The American drew level in the second set, converting the only break of serve in the match.

But Monfils was quickly back into his stride, earning a first break chance at 15-40 in the second game of the final set and another triple break chance in the 10th game at 5-4 and love-40 -- three match points, which Roddick saved.

After coming back from a mini-break down in the tie-breaker, Monfils made his fourth matchpoint count to send the 10th-ranked Roddick crashing out after a battle lasting nearly three hours.

"I tried to be aggressive and control the points. I tried to push him to come to the net a bit more and focus on myself to hit a good first serve and good return of serve," Monfils said.

"When you are in the semifinals, you want to be in the final, for sure. Then if you are in the final, you want to win," he added.

Sneijder to
extend with
Inter

AFP, Rome

Dutch playmaker Wesley Sneijder said Thursday he is set to sign a contract extension that will see him remain with European champions Inter Milan until 2015.

"I'm pretty sure that in the coming weeks I will sign on until 2015," said Sneijder.

"Some other clubs have expressed interest, but I'm feeling comfortable in Milan and at a great club like Inter."

Sneijder helped Inter win Italy's Serie A last season, the Italian Cup and the Champions League. He is among the favourites for the inaugural FIFA Ballon d'Or award.

The European Footballer of the Year and FIFA World Player of the Year awards have been merged into the Ballon d'Or.

India must

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They will also identify with the franchises and their players. That is why it is crucial to open the doors to Pakistan players. It will only improve ties between India and Pakistan," he added.

Talking about the future of Test cricket when the shorter versions of the game are fast becoming more popular, the former Pakistan captain said that the Mohali match between India and Australia "has been a great advertisement for the five-day game."

He however rued that "a two-match series is unfair on the visiting side," and opined that the "ICC must make it mandatory to have at least a three-Test series, if not a five-match contest."

Commenting on the present condition of Pakistan team, Akram said, "Our players have been in the news for the wrong reason and it's all hunky-dory out there. It is so sad to see senior players sitting out when the Pakistan team needs them. Crisis and more crisis are crippling Pakistan cricket. The good is being overshadowed by the bad and that is unfortunate."

The left-arm fast bowler however expressed the hope that the team would "forget about the controversies" and "give their 100 percent" in the upcoming series against South Africa in the UAE.



PHOTO: AFP

India's tennis star Sania Mirza serves against Olivia Rogowska of Australia during their semifinal match at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi yesterday. Sania won 1-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Somdev, Sania in finals

AFP, New Delhi

India's Somdev Devvarman pulled off the first leg of what he hopes will be an Australian double to reach the men's singles final at the Commonwealth Games tennis tournament on Friday.

The top seed won through 6-3, 6-1 against Matt Ebden and will face another Australian, Greg Jones, in the final.

Devvarman, who has broken into the ATP world top 100 this year after a successful college-playing career in the United States, opened strongly with a break of serve to lead 2-0, but Ebden was soon back on level terms with a break of his own.

Cheered on by a small but vociferous block of fans, Devvarman secured a second break of serve in the seventh game to move into a 5-3 lead and broke again in the following game on the back of an Ebden double-fault.

The fleet-footed Indian was in full control of the exchanges and with Ebden struggling to stay with him, the top seed pounced again in the fifth game of the second set to take a 3-1 lead.

When he added another break two games later it was all over as Devvarman stayed on course to become the first ever Commonwealth

Games tennis champion.

"It feels great. Matt's a great player. Once I got a groove, I made it tough for him," Devvarman said.

"It's huge. Today was one of my bigger days. It's a guaranteed medal for the country. I'm very happy with this win."

The other semi-final opposed two Australians, and it was fifth-seed Jones who battled through a strength-sapping encounter to defeat second seed Peter Luczak 6-7, 6-4, 6-2.

In the first of the women's semi-finals, Indian glamour girl Sania Mirza clawed her way back from a 1-6, 1-3 deficit to defeat young Australian Olivia Rogowska 1-6, 6-4, 6-4.

She will play the winner of the other semi-final opposing two Australians - top seed Anastasia Rodionova and fourth seed Sally Peers.

"I was happier with the way I fought than with winning," Mirza said. "I didn't play that well."

"I knew I just needed to fight and come up with something different. I was happy to change my game and adapt."

"She was swinging and was making everything. I had to hang in there. I needed to keep her under pressure. I've been in that situation, too. She played well despite the fact that 4000 people were supporting me."

Behind Jamaica's track

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de mission in the Games, Desmond Brown gave a glimpse of Jamaica's athletics scenario to the reporters at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

"Even though the population is not very large, the number of competitions make us different from others. Children are competing from a very early age and every third child in our country is a potential medal winner," said Brown.

He added, "Every child in Jamaica grows with a feeling like a world champion. We have a tradition of producing champion runners and our children believe that they can emulate their predecessors."

Jamaica had actually started their athletics journey at international level through the 1948 Olympics and surprised the world by winning one gold and two silvers. These medals were won by Arthur Wint and Herbert Mckenley who are regarded as the pioneers of Jamaican athletics.

McKenley set the world record in 400m which he broke again a month later, however finishing behind compatriot Arthur at the London Olympics.

McKenley later coached the Jamaican national team from 1954 to 1973 and also served as president of Jamaica Amateur Athletics Association and helped uphold Jamaica in world of athletics.

Misbah Pak Test captain

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play against," Khan told AFP, stressing the suspended trio will be missed.

"The way Aamer was progressing it is hard to replace him and we had thought the three suspended players would be available for selection, but a decision on them will take some time," said Khan.

An International Cricket Council commission will hear the appeals of the three players in Qatar on October 30 and 31.

Khan hopes recalled pacer-mohammad Sami will step in to fill the gap.

"I hope Sami along with Tanveer (Ahmed) and Umar Gul will perform and shoulder the pace attack," said Khan, referring to the Test attack, which will also miss the ageing Shoib Akhtar.

The 35-year-old Akhtar has been named in the limited over

According to Brown, Jamaica's athletics revolution came in the 50s through development of junior programme for the track-field event. At present, the island boasts the largest junior track event in the world and almost every high school competes at the national championships from where raw talent is picked.

Head coach Maurice Wilson believes the athletes possess certain physical characteristics are the potential medal winners from others.

"Bulky physique was once thought to be powerful, but those days are gone and we look at lower limbs between the knees and ankles. If those are thin and the calf is short, then it is considered that they will be good sprinters," said Wilson adding that they now look for a combination of speed and balance.

Pointing out the immense support from the government, the chef de mission said sport is important for the government, which has programmes for kids to keep them off the streets.

Till Friday, Jamaica have won one gold and one silver from the ongoing Games. They had won 10 gold medals, of which nine came from tracks, in the last edition in Melbourne four years ago.

MU report
huge losses

AFP, London

Manchester United on Friday reported huge losses despite an operating profit, due to the hefty interest payments on their loans.

The English Premier League giants reported an overall loss of 83.64 million pounds (132.7 million dollars, 95.6 million euros) for the financial year to June 2010.

The Red Devils also became the first English club to break the 100-million-pound operating-profit barrier.

They posted figures up 9.4 percent to 100.8 million pounds (160 million dollars, 115 million euros), largely due to increased commercial and broadcasting income.

Gold rush at Games
Heartbreak for Pearson

AFP, New Delhi



The Commonwealth Games reaches the halfway stage of competition on Friday with the busiest day of gold medal action in prospect.

A whopping total of 42 Games titles were scheduled to be on the line after it became clear that Australian sprinter Sally Pearson had suffered heartbreak in the women's 100m sprint.

Hurdles specialist Pearson won Thursday evening's final, but hours later and after completing her lap of honour, she was disqualified for a false start on a protest by England.

She eventually had her medal taken away, elevating Nigeria's Osayemi Oludamola (11.32) into first and Natasha Meyers of St Vincent and The Grenadines (11.37) into second.

The confusion over who had won gold meant that the medal ceremony was held over until Friday.

"I guess I'm just numb right now, I don't really know what I feel. I'm obviously devastated and disappointed," she said.

"It didn't go my way and that's what I have to deal with. I'm just going to use my emotions and my anger and disappointment and put it into the hurdles and hope that I can come out on top."

Australia's domination in track cycling

was briefly interrupted when Alison Shanks of New Zealand held off a strong field to claim gold in the women's 3000m individual pursuit.

But it was soon back to business as usual as Australia won the team sprint gold and Cameron Meyer won the men's scratch race title.

India won two more golds in their favoured shooting competition through Gagan Narang and Imran Hasan Khan in the men's 50m Rifle 3Position pairs and Vijay Kumar in the men's 25m Rapid Fire Pistol.

There was a surprise home win in archery, however, when India pipped England to the gold medal in the women's recurve team event.

With a full programme scheduled in the 60,000-capacity Jawaharlal Nehru stadium (6 golds) and in the swimming pool (10 golds), embattled organisers said they were confident that attendances would rise from the abysmal levels that have marked these Games so far.

On the track it was women's day with the finals of the 400 metres, 1500m and 10,000m as well as the triple jump and the start of the heptathlon. The men had the 110m hurdles final as well as the hammer throw and the climax to the decathlon.

Australian domination of the swimming pool looked set to be extended with

several big names such as breastroker Leisel Jones, backstroke Emily Seebohm and sprinter Brenton Rickard all in action.

Kenya's Jason Dunford qualified fastest in his quest to add the men's 100m butterfly to his 50m gold.

The men's 50m breaststroke final features Tonga's only swimmer in the Games, Amini Fonua, who qualified seventh-fastest.

Malaysia's Nicole David was a strong favourite to add the Commonwealth squash crown to her world titles, while the English top two seeds, Nick Matthew and James Wilstrop, will contest the men's final.

Other gold medals will be won in archery (2), gymnastics (4), cycling (3), shooting (5), weight-lifting (2) and wrestling (3).

Despite the daily litany of things going wrong with the Games, there was a growing sense of pride in the healthy medal haul produced by the home team which has seen them take second place in the table with 14 golds.

That places the hosts well behind Australia but ahead of such traditional Games powerhouses as England, Canada and South Africa.

Most of the Indian gold so far has come from their shooters, weightlifters and wrestlers, but they have high hopes too in tennis which reached the semi-final stages on Friday.

Djokovic in
last four

AFP, Beijing

Top seed and defending champion Novak Djokovic booked his place in the semifinals of the China Open on Friday with an easy straight sets win over France's Gilles Simon, 6-3, 6-2.

Djokovic, the world number two, showed nerves of steel at the Olympic Green Tennis Centre, saving all seven break points that the Frenchman had against him in the first set.

In the second set, the 23-year-old Serb -- playing his first ATP tournament since losing the US Open final to Rafael Nadal -- did not give Simon any openings, going up an early break and never looking back.

Laxman

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Ricky Ponting's tourists face a stern test to draw the series after India pulled off a great escape in Mohali after being reduced to 124-8 while chasing 216 for victory.

Left-arm pacer-mohammad Sami will step in to fill the gap.

Ponting said the Mohali Test was discussed at a team meeting on Thursday evening, with the focus being on an improved batting display by the tourists.

Both sides delayed naming their playing XIs as they waited for the damp wicket to dry. Rain has been forecast on all five days of the match.

SQUADS

AUSTRALIA (from): Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Clarke, Shane Watson, Simon Katich, Michael Hussey, Marcus North, Tim Paine, Nathan Hauritz, Steven Smith, Mitchell Johnson, Ben Hilfenhaus, Peter George, Mitchell Starc, James Pattinson.

INDIA (from): Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain), Virender Sehwag, Murali Vijay, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Venkatesh Laxman, Suresh Raina, Harbhajan Singh, Amit Mishra, Pragyan Ojha, Zaheer Khan, Shanthakumar Sreesanth, Cheteshwar Pujara.

'India have to be united'



INTERNET

The Indian cricket team will have to make a wholehearted, unified and focussed endeavour to nurture hopes of winning the World Cup next year, legendary West Indies batsman Vivian Richards said on Thursday, and appealed to local fans to take the results sportingly.

The ex-captain said that it was crucial for captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni to receive support from all members of the squad at the World Cup, to be played in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh from February-April.

Richards, here as ambassador of the Antigua and Barbuda delegation at the Commonwealth Games, said that much would also depend on the kind of the starts that Virender Sehwag would provide. Legendary allrounder Kapil Dev agreed with him. Kapil and Richards concurred that Sehwag comes closest to the style and swagger of the West Indian.

"At the top of the order, you do need individuals like that [Sehwag]. What I know for sure, the only way that could hamper the way these guys play is the enormous pressure that they put on themselves when they are at home. At times, when they don't do well, egotisms are set alight," Richards told HEAD LINES TODAY in an exclusive interview.

"You have home advantage but that never really suggests that you are going to win it. Everybody collectively got to be thinking the same way. There are so many things. It would be perfect at home and I know Dhoni would be thinking in that particular manner," he said.

Widely regarded as one of the most destructive batsmen of all time, Richards said that fans would have to remain calm.

"I hope that Indian crowds, and certain spectators, are a little bit more forgiving when these things are concerned. They have enough substance in that [national] team in order to

get it done," he emphasised.

Calling Dhoni a "brave" skipper, Richards opined that he and the team would also have bad days along with the good ones.

"Sometimes being captain can add pressure. If he settles down and gets the support, just as in the last Test [against Australia in Mohali], it is what is going to take to lift the cup, not just one or two individuals having a good series," he said.

"But collectively if the team can play well enough, then Dhoni can join the same mould as Kapil winning the World Cup in 1983. This 2011 would be very special, that would be the icing on the cake of all that stuff that they have had, like beating Australia here [in 2000-01], in Australia, and No. 1 ranking as a Test team... just little finishing touches, winning the World Cup," he outlined.

Richards said that the onewicket win in the Mohali Test would boost India's confidence.

"They have a long way to go.

India has done well up to this point and you have got to give them credit ... people like coach Gary Kirsten. I think ever since he came in, there has been a better connection on what can be done," he said. "These close wins give you the opportunity to become so much better." Richards especially lauded VVS Laxman's role - an unbeaten 73 in the second innings with a troublesome back - in Mohali, and said he's a shining example that West Indian players could follow.

"West Indians are just as talented as anyone, getting their mind ready and prepared to do so. And when you look for a perfect example, a Laxman [would be ideal, especially] in the situation that India were the other day," he pointed out.

Former captain Kapil Dev said that Sehwag would be key to India's World Cup plans.

"If he can have the same ruthless approach and performs the way he does, the chances are brighter. The team, collectively, is very important. But certain players play very key roles. I would like to see Yuvraj [Singh] coming back because he is a match winner too," he said.

DELHI DIARY

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in the Commonwealth Games at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range in Delhi.

Shahriar Chandan and Ramjan Ali finished fifth out of six in the pair 50m Rifle three position as Chandan fired 1147 while Ramjan scored 1133 points yesterday.

Meanwhile, South Asian gold medalist pair Sharmin Akhter Ratna and Sadia Sultana will take to the range with the hope of bring another medal from shooting after Asif Hossain Khan and Abdullah Hel Baki won a bronze medal in the 10m air rifle pair event.

LOST AND FOUND

One of hundred volunteers working at the Main Press Center was lauded for his honesty after returning a waist-bag containing a passport, non-validated pass (treated as visa) and dollars to a Bangladeshi journalist.

After using the wash-room at the MPC, he forgot to take his purse. Almost hours later a volunteer found him through the photograph on his passport and returned his purse.

OVER NINE LAKH
TICKETS SOLD

While the venues of all

Commonwealth Games have been struggling to draw the spectators and dispatching complementary tickets to the schools and non-government offices, the games organizing committee has earned Rs 32 crore through the tickets revenue.

"We have sold over nine lakh tickets and collected Rs 32 crore as revenue from ticket sales," OC Secretary General Lalit Bhanot was quoted as saying.

SECOND FROM
BOTTOM

Al Amin finished second from bottom in the high jump of the Commonwealth Games at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium yesterday. Al Amin cleared 7.28m to become 18th among 20 competitors. His best was 7.61m in the national meet.

27 COPS SUSPENDED
FOR NEGLIGENCE

As many as 27 police personal including female cops at the Commonwealth Games village have been suspended for the negligence.

Around 15 of them including five commandos have been suspended in past four-five days after their seniors found them not performing their duties properly. Three constables were suspended on Thursday after they were caught smoking behind the bushes in the premises of the Games village.

A local newspaper said the duty hours and unconventional work environment was taking a toll on cops from Delhi Police who were engaged in the Commonwealth Games security duty.



PHOTO: AFP

Nigeria's Osayemi Oludamola celebrates after the 100m sprint final in Commonwealth Games in New Delhi on Thursday. Australia's Sally Pearson won the race, but after three hours of drama and appeals, the revised result sheet for the final confirmed that Pearson had been disqualified for a false start leaving the top spot to Oludamola.