

Butt keen on return

Cricket

AFP, Lahore
Former Pakistan Test captain Salman Butt said Saturday he was eager to return to cricket and had not stopped practice despite his suspension on allegations of spot-fixing.

Test skipper Butt, 26, fast bowlers Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer were banned from all forms of the game after they were charged with various offences under the anti-corruption code of conduct on September 2.

The charges followed revelations by British tabloid *The News of the World* and subsequent investigations by the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption and security unit into "spot-fixing" allegations during Pakistan's tour of England.

The three players will have their appeals heard in Doha on October 30 and 31. The ICC said Michael Beloff, head of the governing body's code of conduct commission, would hear their appeals against their suspensions.

Butt refused to comment on the spot-fixing allegations as the matter was sub judice but was hopeful things would go well for him.

"I have been keeping my fitness," he told AFP. "If my suspension is lifted on October 31, I will be available to play for Pakistan from the next day."

"I am eager to do that," he added. Salman said the allegations had derailed his career.

"The way I was playing and leading the team was a very good stage of my career but these allegations have derailed it," he said.

Butt took over after tour captain Shahid Afridi retired from Test cricket following Pakistan's defeat against Australia at Lord's.

Under his captaincy, Pakistan beat Australia in the second Test at Leeds -- their first win over Australia for 15 years. Pakistan then lost the first two Tests against England before beating them at The Oval.

England won the fourth Test at Lord's to take the series 3-1 -- two days after the spot-fixing allegations against Pakistani players surfaced.

Salman said the whole episode was a learning experience for him.

"It has taught me a lot about how to deal with the people around you, and you get to recognise people... who is your friend and who is not."

Butt said he was mentally ready to play Pakistan's next series against South Africa starting in United Arab Emirates later this month.

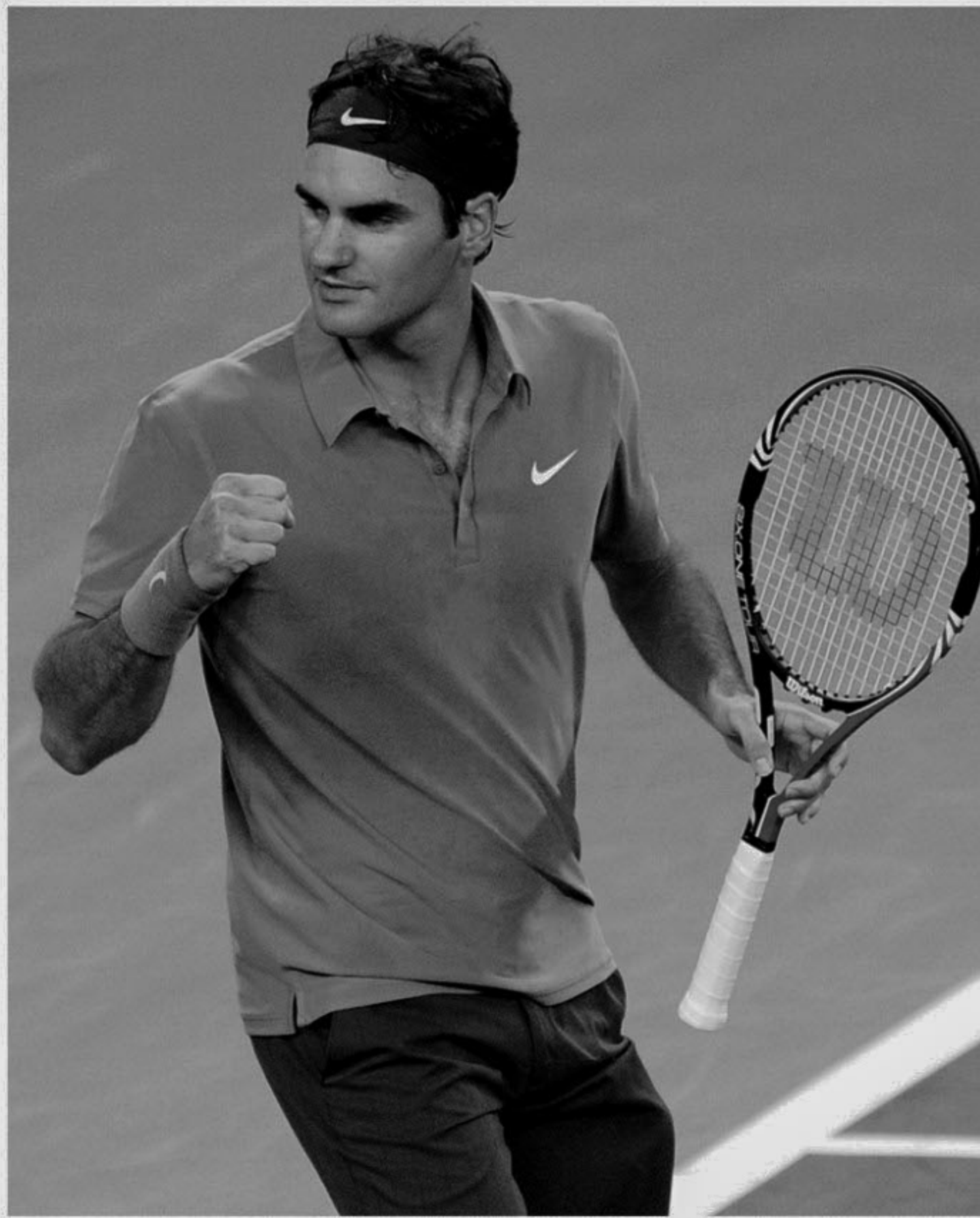


PHOTO: AFP

Swiss superstar Roger Federer pumps his fist after defeating Novak Djokovic of Serbia during their Shanghai Masters semifinal in Shanghai yesterday.

Fed's chance at hand

Tennis

AFP, Shanghai

Roger Federer secured the chance of a revenge win over Andy Murray in the Shanghai Masters final after beating Novak Djokovic 7-5, 6-4 in the semi-final Saturday.

The Swiss third seed came through an hour-long first set at the Qi Zhong centre to regain form and defeat the Serb, who had triumphed over Federer a month ago in the US Open semi-finals.

Scotland's Murray, who has revitalised his game this week after poor showings in New York and Beijing, reached his second Masters 1000 final in succession as he defeated Argentina's Juan Monaco 6-4, 6-1 on Saturday.

Murray beat Federer in the Toronto final two months ago and holds a 7-5 lead over Federer in their career series.

But he could be next in the queue for revenge by the Swiss, who holds a record 16 grand slam titles and has won two trophies in Shanghai.

Now aiming for his 64th career title, Federer won the Australian Open and Cincinnati in what for him has been a sub-par season.

With coach Paul Annacone looking on, the Swiss battled for nearly an hour before breaking Djokovic in the 11th game of the first set after saving four break points to level at two games apiece.

Federer swiftly finished off the set and then broke, to power through the second in a show of strength.

The third seed went up a double break, but

Djokovic clawed one back to no avail as Federer secured his 48th win of the season, putting him into his fourth final of 2010.

Murray's comeback this week -- after an early loss at the US Open and a quarterfinal exit last week in Beijing -- looks to have marked his return to top form.

"In each match I felt better," Murray said.

"I feel like I move well on these courts and can still get my serve through the court to get enough free points."

"It's been a couple of tough weeks, last week in Beijing. Getting ready for Beijing was tricky. This is probably a better result than I expected at the start of the week."

The 23-year-old will be bidding to back up the Toronto crown he won over Federer, and is aiming for his fifth career victory at the elite Masters level.

Murray's win was his 40th of this season, in which he is still seeking a second trophy after winning an ATP-leading six trophies in 2009. He has reached the Shanghai final without losing a set.

"I think I moved really well today, which to me is very important to my game. I have a feeling on the court if I'm running around, chasing a lot of balls down, I feel good," he said.

"In Beijing, I felt slow and sluggish, out of breath quite quickly. So it's quite a big change."

Murray ended his afternoon with 15 winners and the same number of unforced errors, after taking full advantage of nearly 30 errors off his opponent's racquet.

Murray improved his record over Monaco to 2-1 after winning in the second round in Miami last year, but losing two months later at the same stage in Rome.

Don't panic: Nielsen

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Coach Tim Nielsen has urged fans not to write off Australia's chances of retrieving the Ashes against England over the coming months, reports said on Saturday.

Pessimism has greeted Australia's 2-0 series loss to India, making it three straight Test defeats for Ricky Ponting's team for the first time in more than 20 years.

Under Ponting's captaincy, Australia has twice lost the Ashes to England and pressure is building on him amid the national team's painful transition following several high-profile retirements.

But Nielsen has advised fans not to panic following Australia's third successive Test loss and believes they will prove the doubters wrong during the Ashes.

"The most important thing is not to jump to conclusions," Nielsen told *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

"A lot of stuff that's been talked about is being led by public opinion from outside the group, and a lot of the time public opinion is a long way from the action."

"They don't necessarily have an insight into how hard the players are working, and how passionate they are about playing for Australia."

"We know we can do better, we're just looking to the Ashes series as an opportunity to show the Australian public that the hard work we've put in over the last 12 months is going to reap rewards for us."

Nielsen said while England would see potential opportunities to target spinner Nathan Hauritz and their middle batting order, Australia had their own plans, especially for under-pressure batsman Kevin Pietersen.

"We'd like to think we can keep Pietersen at bay, break the opening partnerships early, and won't let them take early wickets," he said.

"If we can have success over Pietersen that would certainly go a way towards opening up their middle order for us."

Pundit Peter Roebuck said although Ponting's position was not under immediate threat, it was difficult to see him continue as captain if Australia lost the Ashes at home to England.

"Ponting still has a lot to offer," Roebuck wrote in the *Herald*.

"To my mind, he can step down as captain at the end of this summer and keep playing."

"He batted superbly in India, and with complete commitment. He needs to separate his two functions, give himself a break and spend the last few years of his career helping his country build its new team."

The Ashes Test series gets under way at Brisbane's Gabba ground on November 25.

Pak officials slam ICC

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Top former Pakistan cricket officials Saturday slammed the International Cricket Council (ICC) after the sport's governing body warned the local board needs to take extraordinary measures to avoid sanctions over alleged corruption.

The ICC Wednesday issued a strict warning to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to implement a series of measures to solve problems faced by the country's cricket or risk sanctions.

"PCB must act and be seen to be acting to uphold the zero-tolerance attitude to corruption in sport and conduct a thorough review of players' integrity, educate them, implement a process and introduce an anti-corruption code in their domestic cricket," the ICC said in a statement after their two-day board meeting in Dubai.

"If the PCB fails to carry out the above to the satisfaction of the board within the next 30 days, the board will consider what further action [including, if appropriate, sanctions] is required in the circumstances," it said.

Pakistan cricket has been rocked by allegations of spot-fixing in the national team's recent tour of England, resulting in two separate inquiries.

The ICC ruled Wednesday there was no evidence of spot-fixing in the third one-day international between Pakistan and England last month but another inquiry, relating to the Lord's Test against

England in August, is pending.

Three players -- Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer -- were provisionally suspended by the ICC after the trio was alleged to have taken money from a book-maker to deliberately bowl no-balls in the Test.

Former ICC president Ehsan Mani said the warning was insulting.

"It is damning," Mani told AFP. "It means that the ICC has publicly called that PCB has to regain confidence of the ICC, and put them under pressure to take serious steps."

Mani said the PCB should have sought an apology from the ICC after they found no evidence of spot-fixing in the Oval match.

"ICC hastily took action on a newspaper report," said Mani, referring to the tip off in British tabloid *The Sun* that Pakistan's scoring pattern in the Oval match was pre-arranged with the book-makers.

"ICC should have the courtesy to apologise to the Pakistan players and the PCB," he said.

"Since the PCB's position was so undermined that they cannot seek apology from the ICC," said Mani, who was ICC president 2003-2006.

Former PCB chairman Khalid Mahmood said the ICC warning was an insult to Pakistan.

"ICC warning is an insult to the whole nation," Mahmood told AFP. "This step of the ICC is an evidence of inability and incompetence of the PCB officials and they have clearly mishandled the whole situation."

But Mahmood said the

ICC was not justified in warning Pakistan.

"ICC has cleared Pakistan of any corruption in the Oval one-day, Scotland Yard has yet to level any charges on the Lord's Test inquiry, under these circumstances the ICC warning is biased and unjustified."

Mahmood blamed the English media for creating problems for Pakistan cricket.

"English media is ready to raise as much muck on Pakistan team, without analysing and without evidence," he said.

Rubic dreams

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As a build-up to the Asian Games, Bangladesh held a month-long training camp at the BKSP where Rubic was present for the last two weeks before the camp was dissolved for the preparation of the clubs.

Rubic thinks that he did not have enough time to prepare the team for the challenge. And he is a little bit concerned about the rustiness among the players of the national side after watching the matches of the ongoing Federation Cup.

"Players are technically not up to the standard and there is some rustiness among the players as well, since they haven't played a competitive game for the last six months."

"But the side going to the Asian Games is young and they will be prepared for the challenges in time," observed Rubic.

Taylor heroics goes awry

Cricket

AFP, Bloemfontein

Hashim Amla and debutant Colin Ingram eased their way to centuries to set up a 64-run win for South Africa in the first one-day international against Zimbabwe in Bloemfontein on Friday.

Amla hit 110 and Ingram 124 as South Africa made 351 for six after winning the toss and taking advantage of a good batting pitch at the Oval.

Zimbabwe opening batsman Brendan Taylor made a superb, career-best 145 not out as the tourists made a spirited reply, scoring 287 for six on a chilly night.

With South Africa missing key bowlers Dale Steyn, Mome Morkel and Jacques Kallis because of injury, captain Graeme Smith said he thought his side's bowling was "decent" despite them being unable to bowl out the Zimbabweans.

"We struggled in the first ten overs but from there to at least 35 overs we were really good. After that the game drifted a bit and it was really cold," he said.

Smith praised a powerful batting performance in which the left-handed Ingram, 25, became the first South African and the sixth player in the world to make a century on a one-day debut.

Ingram had made only three and 12 in two Twenty20 internationals against the

same opponents in the previous seven days.

He had the opportunity to play a substantial innings under minimal pressure, batting at number three after Amla and captain Graeme Smith had put on 64 for the first wicket off only 47 balls.

Man of the match Ingram was able to build his innings by pushing the ball into the gaps while Amla raced to fifty off 32 balls and his fourth one-day international century off 87 deliveries with 14 fours.

Ingram hit only two boundaries as he reached his half-century off 65 balls but he picked up the pace after Amla was run out and finished with 124 off 126 balls, with eight fours and two sixes.

Taylor and Hamilton Masakadza got Zimbabwe off to a fast start, putting on 70 for the first wicket off 74 balls but after that Taylor saw a succession of partners come and go.

He reached his third one-day international century off 105 balls and finished with 145 not out off 136 deliveries, with 12 fours.

Seam bowler Rusty Theron, like Ingram making his one-day international debut after playing in the Twenty20 games, took three for 62.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SOUTH AFRICA: 351 for 6 in 50 overs (Ingram 124, Amla 110, Miller 51; S Masakadza 4-86)

ZIMBABWE: 287 for 6 in 50

overs (Taylor 145 not out, H Masakadza 30; Theron 3-62, Botha 2-41)

Result: South Africa won by 64 runs.
Man-of-the-match: Colin Ingram.

Clarke's time

FROM PAGE 17

to bowl whenever you throw the ball to him," Dhoni said at the end of the Champions League. "He wants to perform; he has grown as a player over the last three IPLs."

Doug Bollinger is the senior-most fast bowler in the squad but is yet to fully recover from the abdominal strain that ruled him out of the Bangalore Test. He hasn't bowled since picking up the injury and it remains to be seen whether he will be fit for Sunday's match. Fast bowler Mitchell Starc could make his debut in case Bollinger misses out.

TEAMS
INDIA (probable): Murali Vijay, Shikhar Dhawan, Suresh Raina, Yuvraj Singh, Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma, MS Dhoni (captain), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Praveen Kumar, Ashish Nehra, Munaf Patel.
AUSTRALIA (probable): David Warner, Tim Paine, Michael Clarke (captain), Shaun Marsh or Callum Ferguson, Michael Hussey, Cameron White, Steve Smith, James Hopes, Nathan Hauritz, Clint McKay, Doug Bollinger or Mitchell Starc.



PHOTO: AFP

South Africa's Colin Ingram glides the ball towards third-man region during his knock of 124 against Zimbabwe in the first one-day international at the Freestate Cricket Stadium in Bloemfontein on Friday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS**
1 Cow catcher
6 Drenched
12 Force
13 Old Rome, e.g.
14 Straighten
15 Frank (Sl.)
16 Check
17 Hoodlums' group
19 Prized possession
20 Pickling agent
22 Curved line
24 Charged bit
27 Firewood quantity
29 Vicinity
32 Fairy tale family
35 Scattered seed
36 "Boola Boola" territory
37 Scrooge's outcry
38 NASCAR sponsor
40 Clothing
- DOWN**
1 Unes-coded
2 Both (Pref.)
3 Shell out
- Solution time: 27 mins.**
- VAL LOAM XRAY
EMU ULNA EURO
DOCUMENT BEEN
AKIMBO ACE
PAS DOGILE
ENTER FOX MAY
GOAD KIR JADE
ALL DAB FUMES
DOCENT POD
JAY ELAPSE
ALOE DOCKHAND
SYNC IRAS LOG
PEST DENY EWE
- 4 Sun
Yat-
5 The Star-
25 "Well, looky here!"
26 "Mary Tyler Moore Show" setting
7 Greek closer
8 Mimic
9 Seafood entree from Alaska
10 Pennsylvania port
11 Consider
12 Mongrel
18 "So soon?"
21 Potsdam pronoun
23 "Norma --"
24 "Monty Python" opener
25 "Well, looky here!"
26 "Mary Tyler Moore Show" setting
28 False belief
30 Detergent brand
31 Bonfire remains
33 Stick with a kick
34 Foundation
39 Iron
41 Sub spotter
42 Pundit's column
43 Egg on stake
45 Initial stake
47 Clothing
48 Genealogy chart
49 "— the fields we go"
51 Evening hour, on a sundial
53 Wildebeest

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CRYPTOQUIP

LSRA VPV GJUFTJVM QCM
LSFY BNRMLCPZSA FVLRV
SRV UFYVVFV GJUF CPBBFV
QNJASFG? "RNTFF VRCYFV!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: NUMBER ONE POP SONG WHICH IS ABOUT A GREAT PAINTER'S LASTING LEGACY: "MY ART WILL GO ON."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals D