



Serbian Davis Cup team members hold aloft the trophy after beating France in the finals at Belgrade Arena on Sunday.

Serbia surprise France

Tennis

AFP, Belgrade

World number three Novak Djokovic and the unheralded Viktor Troicki swept Serbia to an historic first Davis Cup title on Sunday...

Troicki, the world number 30, eased past Michael Llodra 6-2, 6-2, 6-3, after Djokovic had crushed Gael Monfils 6-2, 6-2, 6-4 to pull his country level with his sixth win in six Davis Cup singles rubbers this season.

"It's the best moment of my life," said Troicki, who had lost Saturday's doubles alongside Nenad Zimonjic to Llodra and Arnaud Clement, forcing his team to face a nailbiting last day.

Djokovic marked the historic moment by having his head shaved courtside by his teammates.

"It's history. It's our biggest success as individuals, as a team, as a country," said Djokovic, who had defeated Gilles Simon 6-3, 6-1, 7-5 on Friday after Monfils had given France the advantage with a 6-1, 7-6, 6-0 win over Janko Tipsarevic.

On Sunday, Troicki had been called in to replace Tipsarevic in the crucial singles and the 24-year-old delivered in style, hitting 58 winners to Llodra's 32 in the 2hr 13min encounter.

Only briefly did he look like expectation might get the better of him when, at 4-1 ahead in the third set, he lost two quick games.

But he held his nerve to seal victory when his 30-year-old opponent was left flat-footed by a cross-court backhand winner. Llodra was devastated by his defeat.

"I was crying because I was unable to win the last point for my team and because things didn't happen the way that I wanted them to," he said.

Sunday's triumph will rank alongside Serbia's previous best global performances of the Olympic volleyball gold medal in 2000 and the 2001 European basketball title.

It also better the former Yugoslavia's record in the Davis Cup with three semi-final spots in 1988, 1989 and 1991 being the best outings.

France captain Guy Forget defended his decision to select Llodra despite the left-hander having played for four and a half hours in Saturday's draining doubles.

"We are in the final thanks to 'Mika' and Gael, let's not forget that," said Forget. "I have never seen a guy return the ball like Troicki did today. Gael was outclassed by a stronger player. It's so frustrating to have been so close to our goal but to lose."

Djokovic comfortably sealed a sixth career win in six meetings with Monfils to set the stage for Troicki's fireworks inside a packed Belgrade Arena.

"It's one of the best matches of my career, in the circumstances," said Djokovic. "I have a lot of respect for the French team, especially Gael, who is a good friend."

In the first set, Djokovic broke Monfils twice as he surged to a quick 6-2 advantage.

The Serb broke Monfils again in the sixth game of the second set, and then in the final game, spreading his arms in mock triumph towards the increasingly vociferous partisan crowd as he surged to a 2-0 lead.

To his credit, Monfils upheld his game in the third set, the world number 12 breaking Djokovic twice -- only to cancel that advantage by losing his own service game due to a series of unforced errors.

"I'm very disappointed, I expected to play a lot better," said Monfils.

"I gave it everything I had. After talking to Guy [Forget, team captain] I tried to change tactics a few times because Novak was so strong. He was by far the better player today."

2-1 in more ways than one

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The skipper was however a lot more pleased with the encouraging effort of the two new-ball bowlers. "The good performance of the fast bowlers was the most pleasing part of the match. Mashrafe bhai's bowling was a big positive. I said this before that it'll take him a few matches to get back to old self, so that's what happened today [Monday]," said Shakib.

Mashrafe, wicketless and under pressure in the first two games, finally returned to his previous self with a bright spell that was eight overs long. There were several near misses and the Narail Express finally picked up a wicket in the final over his first spell, completely fooling Tatenda Taibu with his late inswing, the batsman shouldering arms and being left exposed.

But Shafiqul Islam ensured his place among the top three wicket-takers this year with another energetic effort. He removed Craig Ervine early, ensuring the anchor of the Zimbabwe innings would be

missing and then mopped up the tail.

"Whenever we've bowled in this series, we got help from the wicket. We bowled first twice and today the wicket hardly changed throughout the day."

"It worked as an advantage for us," said Shakib.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the third one-day international between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Monday:

Table with columns: BANGLADESH, Zimbabwe, Runs, Wickets. Includes details for Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Karim, Junaid Siddique, Rokibul Hasan, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Naeeem Siddique, Sohrawardi, Mashrafe Miah, Extras, Total, Fall of wickets, Result.

Table with columns: S, Masakadza, Chibhabha, Price, Utseya, Cremer, Taylor, Runs, Wickets.

ZIMBABWE

Table with columns: Taylor, Chibhabha, H Masakadza, Taibu, Ervine, Chakabva, Utseya, Cremer, Price, Mpofo, Extras, Total, Fall of wickets, Result.

Result: Bangladesh won by 65 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Abdur Razzak.

Rain fleeces SA

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overs being docked for rain, the target would be reduced by just two runs, leaving the chasing team to score 248 runs to tie, and 249 to win from 45 overs. The system at first seemed fair enough, but at a crucial juncture of the tournament it was exposed as being shortsighted and not thought through.

Victories over Australia, West Indies, Pakistan, India and Zimbabwe in the league stage had propelled the returning South Africa to the semifinals in their first global tournament after returning from exile, where under gloomy Sydney skies they took on favourites England. Graeme Hick stroked a fluent 83 to take England to an above-par 252. Fast-medium bowler Meyrick Pringle bowled excellently, giving

away only 37 runs in nine overs that included two maidens and two wickets. Little did he know that he had stabbed his team in the foot.

The new entrants showed great spirit and character, with all the batsmen getting to double figures. With four wickets left the Proteas needed to score 22 off the last thirteen deliveries, before the heavens opened. With the clock ticking away, the scoreboard showed a reduction of one over but no reduction of runs required: 22 off seven deliveries, before the heavens opened. With the clock ticking away, the scoreboard showed a reduction of one over but no reduction of runs required: 22 off seven deliveries, before the heavens opened.

and South Africa were robbed of a chance to fight to get to the final.

The image of a forlorn Brian Mcmillan thumping the final ball down to mid-on remained one of the enduring memories of this tournament.

The architects of the rule had failed to take into account the scenario in which the chase was almost complete like in South Africa's case, where a reduction of overs would unfairly skew the odds in the favour of the side batting first. Blame could also be laid at the door of the organisers, who had the option of a reserve day, but Channel Nine, the official broadcasters decreed that the match must be completed that day. Perhaps this misfortune was the start of South Africa's astonishing run of bad luck and choking in World Cups.

BOA to assist Mahbub's family

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) decided to give Tk 5000 monthly to the family of late sprinter Mahbub Alam, said a press release from BOA yesterday. The press release said that this money will be given every month for the next three years, starting from this month.

Mahbub, a gold medalist in the 1995 South Asian Games and two-time national champion died from a road accident on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway on Saturday.

Wasim calls for unity

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani cricket hero Wasim Akram on Monday urged players, fans and the media to move on from recent high-profile problems and get behind the country to win the 2011 World Cup.

"Let's forget what problems we've been going through recently and with a positive frame of mind support the Pakistan team to win next year's World Cup," Wasim said in a rallying call during a ceremony unveiling the trophy.

Pakistan has been blighted by a spot-fixing crisis, player suspensions and poor governance, with one-day captain Shahid Afridi expressing a lack of confidence in preparations for the mega event.

Three key players -- Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer -- were provisionally suspended by the International Cricket Council (ICC) over accusations of spot-fixing during the tour to England in the summer.

The trio appear before a ICC code of conduct tribunal in Doha, Qatar next month and face severe punishment, including lengthy bans.

BTB and ICC

FROM PAGE 17 would be encouraged to cast more votes for the Sundarbans.

Recently the tourism ministry signed an agreement with ICC for becoming the local partner of the World Cup. As per the agreement the ministry gave nearly five crore taka as sponsorship money to the ICC Development (International) Limited for showing the "Country Brand-Beautiful Bangladesh" at its all publicity materials for promoting tourism of Bangladesh.

A television commercial featuring the country's exciting tourism destinations and facilities would be broadcast by the sports channels -- Star Sports, ESPN and all official broadcasters of the World Cup.

Apart from sponsoring ICC, BTB has chalked out various programmes for promoting tourism during the World Cup in the country, ministry sources said.

Massive win

FROM PAGE 17 Ching Marma scoring twice and Sabina Khatun netting the other.

After the resumption, Sabina struck her second goal while Jahanara Akter, Iri and Sui Nu Marma added a goal each to complete the rout.

Bhutan are expected to play their second match against Bangladesh tomorrow.

Eng sniff victory

Cricket

AFP, Adelaide

Australia suffered a massive blow with the loss of key batsman Michael Clarke in the final over Monday to leave them facing an uphill battle to salvage the second Ashes Test against England.

Clarke looked set to go to stumps leading a fighting rearguard action at the Adelaide Oval only to fall to a catch close to the wicket off part-time spinner Kevin Pietersen, with only four balls left of the fourth day.

Clarke had appeared to have recaptured his best form after cheap dismissals in Brisbane and the Adelaide first innings before he was out for 80.

At stumps Australia, chasing 375 runs to make England bat again, were 238 for four with Mike Hussey the not out batsman on 44.

Clarke was initially given not out and refused to walk off until England called for a referral and replays showed that the ball had come off his bat to Alastair Cook fielding close in.

"Just want to apologise for not walking off the ground tonight when I hit the ball. I was just so disappointed, my emotions got best of me," Clarke said via Twitter after play.

England spinner Graeme Swann, who looms as his team's major weapon on Tuesday's final day, said it was a significant wicket for the tourists.

"It's a massive bonus for us. It was tough going for us in the last session, their two best players against spin at crease, both playing well," he said.

"Sometimes you need a bit of inspiration and who else but KP [Pietersen] to come on and give you it."

Hussey said it was a "kick in the guts"

to lose Clarke. "We're going to have to keep fighting hard and I thought we fought pretty hard today. It was a bit of a kick in the guts to lose that one in the last over."

Clarke, the Australian vice-captain, went to the crease under pressure following scores of nine and two and his team needing him to produce a long match-saving innings against dominant England, who are chasing their first win in Adelaide since 1995.

Rain might yet assist Australia's rearguard after a storm suspended play for an hour after tea and with more bad weather forecast for Tuesday's final day.

Top-rated spinner Swann proved the major threat with his sharp turn out of the footmarks and he captured the key wickets of Simon Katich and Ricky Ponting.

Katich's painful resistance ended in the 30th over, when he pushed forward to Swann and got a touch for wicketkeeper Matt Prior.

The stoic left-hander battled a painful Achilles injury and hobbled for his 43 off 85 balls to help build an opening stand of 84.

Katich later went to hospital to have scans of his injury with the results expected on Tuesday.

Swann got Ponting's prized wicket when the Aussie skipper came forward and edged to slip, where Paul Collingwood snapped up a great low two-handed catch.

It was a huge setback for the Australians, with Ponting lasting only 21 minutes for his nine when occupation was more important than runs.

Opener Shane Watson again failed to go on after a good start when he nicked Steven Finn to Andrew Strauss at first slip for 57.

England amassed their fifth highest innings in Ashes Tests and their second

best in Australia, only surpassed by a 636 scored in Sydney in 1928.

Skipper Strauss finally called a halt to the run onslaught at 620 for five with Ian Bell unbeaten on 68 and wicketkeeper Matt Prior not out 27.

The tourists lost only the wicket of Pietersen for his Test best score of 227 in the 40 minutes of free scoring, in which they added 69 off nine overs.

Pietersen smashed beleaguered spinner Xavier Doherty's first ball of the day through midwicket for four but went for a lusty swing at the next ball which turned sharply out of the rough to Katich at slip. Pietersen amassed his haul off 308 balls with 34 fours and a six and he shared in a 116-run partnership with Bell in 125 minutes.

His previous best Test score was 226 against the West Indies in May 2007.

On Sunday Pietersen became only the fifth Englishman to score a double century in Australia with his first century in 28 Test innings since his 102 against the West Indies at Port-of-Spain in March last year.

Dominant England have amassed 1,137 runs runs for six wickets in their last two innings in this series.

England paceman Stuart Broad strained stomach muscles during his second bowling spell but returned to the field after the rain break.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 245 (Hussey 93, Haddin 56, Watson 51; Anderson 4-51, Swann 2-70, Broad 1-39)

ENGLAND: First innings 620 for 5 declared (Cook 148, Pietersen 227, Trotter 78, Collingwood 42, Bell 68 not out, Prior 27 not out; Harris 2-84, Watson 1-44, Bollinger 1-130)

AUSTRALIA: Second innings 238 for 4 (Watson 57, Katich 43, Ponting 9, Clarke 80, Hussey 44 not out; Swann 2-72)

India eye whitewash

Fourth ODI against NZ today

Cricket

AGENCIES, Bangalore

An unassailable lead in hand, the rampaging Indian cricket team will now push for a series whitewash when they take on a grossly mismatched New Zealand in the inconsequential fourth one-day of the five-match rubber here on Tuesday.

Stand-in skipper Gautam Gambhir has led from the front with back-to-back centuries to inflict one of the worst series defeats on the visitors in the two countries' bilateral history which dates back to 1975-76.

The second string team's exemplary performance in the absence of Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Suresh Raina and Harbhajan Singh has also given a boost to the side's World Cup aspirations.

The young players such as Virat Kohli, Murali Vijay and Saurabh Tiwary have made an impact and would have impressed regular captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni just a couple of months ahead of the World Cup being hosted in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Chairman of the national selection panel,

Krish Srikkanth, said the youngsters have done well for themselves and their performance has shown that team's World Cup preparations are going according to the plan. "Youngsters in the team have proved that the bench strength is good."

It is important that we keep winning all our matches up to end of the World Cup," Srikkanth said ahead of the match. "Overall, I am confident that the players will perform to their potential and keep the momentum."

"I am glad that the preparation for the World Cup is on the right track," he said. As for Tuesday's match, the Indian players are an upbeat lot and would be looking to keep the momentum going for a whitewash.

Despite being a second-string side, the Indians have proved themselves better on all counts against a short-of-confidence New Zealand, which came here after being hammered 0-4 by minnows Bangladesh.

The Indian line-up has not exactly missed the dashing Virender Sehwag or the reliable Sachin Tendulkar as he likes Virat Kohli have stepped in effortlessly against a rather ineffective Kiwi attack.

Kohli, who has been good nick in the domestic circuit, has been solid so far along with Murali Vijay.

India's Plan 2

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricketers will depart from normal routine and arrive in South Africa in batches in order to acclimatise ahead of their much-anticipated Test series.

India are due to play the first Test in Centurion from December 16, just six days after the final one-day international against New Zealand ends in Chennai on December 10.

With no practice match pencilled in, India's South African coach Gary Kirsten hit upon a novel idea to ensure his players get used to the conditions before the series began.

A majority of the 17-man squad, who were rested for the New Zealand one-dayers, will reach South Africa this week to prepare for the three-match series that pits top-ranked India against the number two hosts.

"We have a lot of work still to do on the specifics of technique prior to the series," Kirsten was quoted as saying by Cricinfo. "The players will need time to adjust and get comfortable with the conditions."

The players will train at Kirsten's cricket academy in Cape Town before moving to Johannesburg to join the rest of the squad.

India, fielding an under strength team for the New Zealand one-dayers, enjoy an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series with stand-in captain Gautam Gambhir hitting two centuries.

Rubcic picks 54 for trials

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Of the 54 players, 16 players have either played or were picked for the U23 team, nine players played for U20 side, 11 players played for the U19 team and one each played for the U17 and the national side.

Sixteen players, however, have no experience to play in any national sides.

As most of the proven

defenders have failed to meet the required age as per Olympics guidelines, the coach has chosen the maximum number of defenders.

The selected players, split into four teams, will play four practice matches among themselves in two days on December 9 and 11 at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

However, the squad Rubcic will pick through the trials is not the final team as the coach said that he might pick more players after seeing the performance of the players in the upcoming Bangladesh League.

Bangladesh will play their first game against Kuwait on February 23 and will host the same opponents in Dhaka on March 9.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues: ACROSS 37 Winter forecast, 38 'Loves me (not)' flower, 39 Buck-eyes' sch. Work with Pink-slip, 40 Dermatology case, 41 Add on The 'Crime Dog' March King, 42 Paid player in Month in Marseilles, 43 Spritlike Blue, 44 Illustrations, 45 Southpaw, 46 Hungry, 17 Bionic man, 19 'Phooey!' student, 21 Yale student, 22 Calendar abbr., 24 Shark's giveaway, 26 Riddle, 28 Actress Kirsten, 30 Bawl, 32 Peaved, 33 Curse, 34 Ram's mate, 36 Costume, 38 Chokes, 39 Ghana's capital, 40 '— We Trust', 42 Museum stand, 45 Somewhere out there, 46 'Unforgettable' singer, 48 Ms. Thurman, 50 Perch, 51 Whatever amount.

Crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-51.

CRYPTOQUIP

C X H R M C Q N K Q Q S V D Q C T T K Z

M S X K C M R D M A K V C L K

H W Z K H B , X R M A K Z W Z T ' M

K L K T B P H C M P A M A K B R H N K H B .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE FELLOW BRINGING

THE LAWSUIT SEEMS VERY MOURNFUL. HE'S

PROBABLY A PLAINTIVE PLAINTIFF.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals D