

Sharapova vows to break clay jinx

AFP, Paris

Maria Sharapova has vowed to put years of clay court under-achievement behind her, starting with victory over German 15th seed Andrea Petkovic in Wednesday's French Open quarterfinals.

Sharapova, the seventh seed, has tasted success at Wimbledon (2004), the US Open (2006) and the Australian Open (2008), but her best Roland Garros showing remains a straight sets semifinal defeat by Ana Ivanovic in 2007.

The former world number one is a different prospect on clay these days, however, and demonstrated her newly acquired ease on the dirt by triumphing at the Rome Masters earlier this month.

With the top three seeds already eliminated at Roland Garros, Sharapova will also know that this year's tournament may represent her best ever chance of becoming the 10th woman to complete a career Grand Slam.

"I've always said it would be challenging to win here but I've always worked hard on preparing myself as best as I could," said Sharapova, after a 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 defeat of Polish 12th seed Agnieszka Radwanska in round four.

"Physically, and mentally; knowing that you have to be more patient here than maybe at other points in other tournaments."

"It's just going out there and believing in what you've done before and what you've prepared."

Sharapova has a 3-1 win-loss record against Petkovic, who stunned the Russian in straight sets in the last 16 at this year's Australian Open before Sharapova gained her revenge in the semi-finals of the Miami Masters.

"We played in Melbourne and then in Miami, a month or so ago," said Sharapova.

"She's a very tough opponent. She's also quite good on this surface and moves well, and she'll use that to her advantage. It'll be tough but I'll go out and try to win that match."

Petkovic's 6-2, 2-6, 6-4 victory over Russian 25th seed Maria Kirilenko equalled her best Grand Slam performance, following her run to the last eight in Melbourne.

A win over Sharapova would take her into the last four at a major for the very first time, but the 23-year-old world number 12 said she was simply thrilled to be moving in such exalted circles.

"Any quarter-final in a Grand Slam is going to be a test," said Petkovic, who won her second career singles title at Strasbourg earlier this month.

"I've played her (Sharapova) twice this year already. She's a great champion and I admire her a lot, both as an athlete and how she handles herself."

"I think she represents women's tennis really well. I feel honoured to be in the quarter-finals at all and even more so playing such a champion."

Pakistan sweep series

AFP, Belfast

Pakistan completed a 2-0 one-day international series win over Ireland in Belfast with victory by five wickets at Stormont here on Monday that rounded off eight months on the road.

Pakistan, set a target of 239, won with eight balls to spare thanks mainly to half-centuries from Younis Khan (64) and Umar Akmal (60 not out).

Only Mohammad Hafeez, dismissed in the second over without scoring, failed but Tafiq Umar and Azhar Ali, in his first one-day international, shared 65 for the second wicket to put Pakistan back on course.

Younis Khan played the decisive innings with 64 from 74 balls, including four fours and a six.

He shared stands of 68 for the fourth wicket with captain Misbah-ul-Haq and 69 for the fifth with Akmal, who faced just 48 balls and hit six fours and a six.

The Ireland bowlers stuck to their task well with Boyd Rankin the most economical, conceding just 29 runs in his nine overs and also ending the innings of Azhar Ali, caught at slip by Paul Stirling.

It was Stirling who was named man-of-the-match after setting up the contest with a wonderfully entertaining 109, his first century against a Full Member nation, to follow ODI hundreds against Canada and, at the recent World Cup, the Netherlands.

SCORES IN BRIEF

IRELAND: 238

PAKISTAN: 242 for 5 in 48.4 overs (Umar 32, Azhar 39, Younis 64, Misbahul 32, Akmal 60 not out)

Result: Pakistan won by five wickets and clinched the two-match series 2-0.

Man-of-the-match: Paul Stirling.

NOTICE

Due to unavoidable circumstances, we could not print the CROSSWORD today. We regret any inconvenience.

—Sports Editor



Russia's Maria Sharapova celebrates after beating Agnieszka Radwanska in the fourth round of the French Open at Roland Garros on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

"I'll have to play my best claycourt tennis to beat her."

Wednesday's other quarter-final pits Belarusian fourth seed Victoria Azarenka against Chinese sixth seed Li Na, the first player from her country to reach the last eight at Roland Garros.

Azarenka, the top-ranked player left in the draw, beat Russia's Ekaterina Makarova 6-2, 6-3 in the fourth round, while Li laboured to a 2-6, 6-1, 6-3 defeat of Czech ninth seed Petra Kvitova.

Azarenka has beaten Li just once in four attempts, most recently losing in the last 16 at the Australian Open, and has never gone beyond the quarter-finals at a Grand Slam.

"I'm in a different chapter of my career," said Azarenka.

"It's going to be a different quarter-final for me. But I'm feeling really confident and I'm really looking forward to it."

Tendulkar India's best

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

Record-breaking batsman Sachin Tendulkar on Tuesday received India's cricketer-of-the-year award for his outstanding performances in 2009-2010.

Tendulkar, the world's leading scorer in both Test and one-day cricket, won the Polly Umrigar award, named after a former India captain, at a function held by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in Mumbai.

The master batsman scored 1,064 runs, including one double-century and five hundreds, in 10 Tests during the year in question, October 2009 to September 2010, at an average of 82.

Tendulkar also scored 695 runs in 12 one-day internationals, including the first double-century in one-dayers, against South Africa in Gwalior in February 2010.

Former Test all-rounder Salim Duran received the CK Nayudu award, named after another former India skipper, for his lifetime contribution to the game.

Durian, an exciting stroke-player and effective left-arm spinner, played 29 Tests from 1960 to 1973, scoring 1,202 runs and taking 75 wickets, including a major role in India's maiden Test series victory in the West Indies in 1971.

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Man-of-the-match: Paul Stirling.



India's record-breaking batsman Sachin Tendulkar poses with the cricketer-of-the-year trophy during the BCCI Awards 2009-2010 function in Mumbai yesterday.

Akram takes charge from today

SPORTS REPORTER

Akram Khan will officially take charge of the national selection committee from today.

The former national captain, who led the country between 1995 and 1998, will have fellow former captains Minhazul Abedin and Habibul Bashar in the three-member panel that will oversee all national line-ups, though the duration of their first contract is not clear.

Their first task is the announcement of the 30-member preliminary squad that will train from June 4. It is understood that the panel have already finalised the team and submitted to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The board did not extend the contract of the Rafiqul Alam-led committee which began its reign in 2007.

Akram was also part of that committee from the beginning while it is the first such assignment for Bashar and Minhazul.

Donavan Secondary in schools final

SPORTS REPORTER

Patuakhali's Donavan Secondary School reached the final of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School competition by beating Faridpur Muslim Mission School by 67 runs at Madaripur Stadium yesterday.

Batting first after winning the toss, Donavan made 136 runs in 44.3 overs with Sabbir top-scoring with an unbeaten 48.

For the Faridpur school, Samrat took three wickets for 17.

In reply, Imran and Rakibul took three wickets each to skittle out Faridpur Muslim Mission School for just 69 runs in 26.1 overs.

Sabbir was adjudged man-of-the-match.

In the second semifinal on Friday, Chittagong Police Institution face Pabna Zilla School at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

The final will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on June 5.

As many as 540 schools from all 64 districts of the country took part in the competition.

New calendar

FROM PAGE 16

that they can take adequate preparation.

"Last season we faced lot of problems with the availability of the grounds. On the other hand, why we have to look at an issue like accommodation when there is a logistic committee," observed Ashraf.

"What I personally feel is that we have to be more sincere in the domestic competitions as well as concentrate more on this area if we want to bring massive changes. My observation is that we have a lack of manpower and I also have doubt whether we can handle everything professionally."

"You can't depend on someone who is involved with international matches as well as with domestic competitions. You need dedicated people for every single competition so that it will not be hampered for any individual," he continued.

Ashraf also believed that the board should strengthen their ties with the district organisers and must improve their facilities. "It's surprising that NSC [National Sports Council] are giving grants to the district associations but unfortunately there is no follow-up on whether they organise the major events like cricket," he expressed his surprise.

FACTFILE

Factfile on Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi, who has announced his retirement from international cricket.

Full name: Sahibzada Mohammad Shahid Khan Afridi

Born: March 1, 1980 in

Pak greats blame PCB

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani greats expressed dismay Tuesday at Shahid Afridi's shock decision to quit international cricket, as officials said the "doors are open" for the influential all-rounder's return.

Former captain Rashid Latif urged the government to resolve the problem of the national team losing top players after Afridi, who was stripped of the one-day captaincy after a spat with authorities, retired late Monday.

"His decision to retire, after people like Younis Khan and Mohammad Younis left, should be treated as a serious issue and I demand the Pakistan government to form a committee and solve this," said Latif.

Ex-skipper Wasim Akram, under whom Afridi developed in the 1990s, called the development "sad" and said Pakistan had become a standing joke in cricket circles.

"It is sad and will hurt Pakistan cricket badly," Wasim told AFP. "Just last month Afridi was showered with praise after he took Pakistan to the World Cup 2011 semifinal, given cash awards and suddenly this happened."

"Wherever I go people ask me what's happening in Pakistan cricket. They laugh at us and I am left embarrassed," he added. "I think even the best doctors do not have a treatment for Pakistan cricket."

Afriadi, 31, stood down from international duty after a row with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) over critical comments about coach Waqar Younis after this year's World Cup, when the team reached the semi-finals.

"I am dejected and hurt and whatever I said about the coach it was in the best interest of the team," he told AFP from London.

"I will not play under this set-up of the PCB which has treated players roughly," he added.

Waqar asked to return

Cricket

CRICINFO

The PCB has requested national coach Waqar Younis to return to Pakistan after the Ireland tour, instead of going to Australia, to discuss manager Intikhab Alam's report on the West Indies tour. Waqar was supposed to go to Australia to see his wife, who is unwell, but has been asked to return to Pakistan if her illness is not serious.

"We want to discuss in detail the report of manager Intikhab Alam on the tour and if Waqar comes here it will help us discuss the report in a better way," Subhan Ahmed, CEO of the Pakistan board told reporters in Lahore.

There has been speculation over differences between Waqar and Shahid Afridi, and matters apparently came to a head during Pakistan's recent tour of West Indies, where Afridi was the captain for the limited-overs leg of the tour. Afridi was reportedly unhappy with what he saw as Waqar's interference in selection; one report claimed Afridi almost walked out of a selection meeting ahead of the fourth ODI against West Indies and had to be persuaded by Intikhab to come back.

Afriadi hinted at these differences upon his arrival from the West Indies for which he was issued a showcase notice by the PCB and

subsequently was replaced as Pakistan's ODI captain for their tour of Ireland. Afridi pulled out of that tour and has since announced his "conditional" retirement from the international game, as a mark of protest against the way he has been "humiliated" by the PCB.

Former Pakistan cricketers have criticised the board's handling of Afridi. "This is a mistake of [the] PCB administration. Afridi never took any names while he criticised the policies and board took note of that. Why is no one in the government taking notice of PCB's actions of last three years?" Moin Khan told AFP. Wasim Akram agreed that the board had been unfair towards Afridi, but said the captain should not have gone public with the team's issues. "As Pakistan captain, Afridi should not have made his differences with [the] coach public and should have solved them without coming to the media," he said.

"But the PCB has also not tackled this fairly," Subhan said that Afridi would not be part of the meeting and added that the PCB would first discuss the report with the team management.

Dernbach replaces Anderson

AFP, Cardiff

Uncapped Surrey seamer Jade Dernbach was called up into a 12-man England squad on Tuesday for the second Test against Sri Lanka at Lord's starting on Friday after James Anderson was forced out with injury.

Anderson suffered a side strain during the course of England's first Test win and the swing bowler was not on the field when Sri Lanka were shot out for just 82 at Sophia Gardens here on Monday to give the hosts an innings and 14 run victory that left them 1-0 up in this three-match series.

High Court

FROM PAGE 16

divided into two factions -- one led by Mosaddeq Ali and the other by former general secretary Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan.

The club has the legal obligation of holding the election within 90 days of its incorporation and the polls were scheduled to take place on June 5, but the election commission stopped the proceedings as no nomination papers were submitted within the deadline. It has been learnt that the candidates refrained from submitting nominations as part of an effort to form a consensus panel.

But it appears at the moment that a consensus is a distant reality.