

Nadal in injury scare

Big names record easy victories

AP, Melbourne



Rafael Nadal has a new injury scare -- a tendon problem in his right knee that nearly forced him to forfeit a first-round match at the Australian Open that he managed to win easily.

Roger Federer, defending champion Kim Clijsters and top-seeded Caroline Wozniacki, also bothered by injuries coming into the tournament, all advanced to the second round in more routine fashion and appeared as if they were over their ailments.

That wasn't the case with Nadal. Bothered by a left shoulder injury late last year, Nadal had his right knee heavily taped during his 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 win over Alex Kuznetsov. The injury occurred in the most innocent of ways -- sitting in a chair in his hotel room when he felt "a crack" in his knee and some "unbelievable pain."

He had an MRI scan late Sunday that showed no major damage to his knee, but before that, the incident left him thinking "I wasn't 100 per cent sure I would have a chance to play."

Federer, who pulled out of a tournament in Doha two weeks ago with back soreness, began the quest for his 17th Grand Slam title -- and first since the 2010 Australian Open -- with a 7-5, 6-2, 6-2 win over qualifier Alexander Kudryavtsev.

It was Federer's 60th win at the Australian Open, and he also has 60-plus wins at Wimbledon and the US Open.

The third-seeded Federer took the first two sets and was up a break in the third before the Russian rallied with a break of serve in the fifth game of the final set. Federer, however, broke Kudryavtsev in the next game with a backhand crosscourt winner and sealed the match when the Russian hit a forehand wide.

He batted away just as quickly speculation about a possibly divisive issue with Nadal. Nadal was critical of Federer on Sunday for not speaking out publicly in support of players who are pushing the ATP for changes in areas such as tournament scheduling and prize money.

Defending women's champion Clijsters opened with a 7-5, 6-1 win over Portuguese qualifier Maria Joao Koehler, showing no signs

of the hip spasms which forced her to withdraw from a tuneup event in Brisbane 10 days ago.

Wozniacki, who injured her left wrist in a quarterfinal loss at the Sydney International, showed no signs of discomfort while easily beating Australia's Anastasia Rodionova 6-2, 6-1 in the last match of the evening on Rod Laver Arena.

Li Na, who lost the Australian final to Clijsters last year, had a 6-3, 6-1 win over Ksenia Pervak of Kazakhstan. In the first featured match of the tournament, third-seeded Victoria Azarenka won 12 straight games to finish off Heather Watson 6-1, 6-0 in 67 minutes in the opening match on Centre Court.

Li was a trailblazer for China last year, reaching a Grand Slam singles final for the first time before losing to Clijsters at Melbourne Park. At the subsequent major, she won the French Open to become the first player from China to win a Grand Slam singles title.

Of the six women who can reach the top ranking, eighth-ranked Agnieszka Radwanska has the biggest task, having to win the Australian title. She had a battle on her hands just to make the second round, fending off American Bethanie Mattek-Sands 6-7 (10), 6-4, 6-2 in a three-hour match on Show Court 2.

Other women advancing included No. 16-seeded Peng Shuai of China, No. 20 Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia, No. 22 Julia Goerges, No. 26 Anabel Medina Garrigues of Spain and Eleni Daniilidou of Greece beat 41-year-old Kimiko Date-Krumm of Japan 6-3, 6-2.

No. 19 Flavia Pennetta, No. 23 Lucie Safarova and No. 28 Yanina Wickmayer were among the first-round losers.

Most of the local attention Monday was on 19-year-old Bernard Tomic, who rallied from two sets down to beat No. 22-seeded Fernando Verdasco 4-6, 6-7 (3), 6-4, 6-2, 7-5. A five-set win over the 2009 semifinalist will no doubt give Tomic a confidence boost as he attempts to become the first Australian man since 1976 to win the national title.

Eighth-seeded Mardy Fish, the highest ranked of the US men, had a 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 win over Gilles Muller to progress along with 2009 US Open champion Juan Martin del Potro, No. 7 Tomas Berdych, No. 10 Nicolas Almagro, No. 13 Alexandr Dolgopopolov, No. 18 Feliciano Lopez, No. 21 Stanislav Wawrinka of Switzerland and No. 30 Kevin Anderson of South Africa.

Sachin back in one-day squad

AFP, New Delhi

India picked Sachin Tendulkar on Sunday for the tri-series in Australia, ending the star batsman's self-imposed exile from one-day cricket outside the World Cup.

Tendulkar, the world's leading one-day batsman who is chasing his 100th international century, was included in a 17-man squad for the tri-series against Australia and Sri Lanka, to be played from February 5 to March 8.

The same squad, led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni, will also feature in two Twenty20 internationals against hosts Australia in Sydney on February 1 and in Melbourne on February 3.

His inclusion means Tendulkar will have further opportunities to record a 100th ton if he is unable to achieve the landmark in the final Test against Australia in Adelaide later this month.

The Indian cricket board announced the squad on the day Dhoni's men were thrashed by an innings and 37 runs in the Perth Test to give Australia a decisive 3-0 lead in the four-match series.

SQUAD

Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain), Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Suresh Raina, Manoj Tiwary, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Rahul Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Praveen Kumar, Vinay Kumar, Zaheer Khan, Irfan Pathan, Parthiv Patel.

Laxman played his last Test?

AFP, Perth

Speculation is mounting over the future of Indian batsman VVS Laxman after another unimpressive showing at the crease in India's innings defeat to Australia at the WACA Ground.

Indian newspapers reported he would retire at the end of the four-Test series, which concludes in Adelaide next week, and may even have played his last Test in Perth as he battles to keep his place in the side.

The 37-year-old has been one of the chief offenders in India's poor batting performances in Australia, with just 102 runs at an average of 17 in the series so far with a single half-century the highlight.

In Perth the veteran of 133 Tests battled manfully in making 31 in the first innings, but fell for a duck in the second innings.

His contribution is in stark contrast to his career average of 50.65 against Australia for the man who famously partnered with Rahul Dravid in an incredible 376-run stand in Kolkata in 2001 that enabled India to win after following-on.

Local snippets

FROM PAGE 16 In the second match, BKSP beat Tangail 3-1. Rabbi, Salman and Khorshed scored one goal apiece for BKSP while Manik scored the consolation goal for Tangail.

WOMEN'S CORPORATE FOOTBALL The inaugural Women's Corporate Football League begins today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with only four houses taking part in the 10-day meet.

After playing the round-robin league matches, top two teams will fight for the trophy on January 27. Participating teams are Team BJMC, Sheltech, Sunbeam Properties Ltd and BRAC, a non-government organization. Team BJMC and BRAC will play the opening match.

This was revealed at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday with BFF Women's Committee chairman Sirajul Islam Bachchu, secretary Mahfuza Akhter Kiron and sponsors Walton's deputy director Iqbal Bin Anwar present. Walton will provide Tk 4 lakh as title sponsors.

Mission move forward

First Pak-Eng Test in Dubai starts today



AFP, Dubai

Pakistan and England hope to move on from the infamous 2010 spot-fixing case when they go into the first of three Tests from Tuesday in their first encounter since the scandal that rocked the game.

Salman Butt, then Pakistan's Test captain, and pacemen Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer were handed lengthy bans by the International Cricket Council last year before being jailed by an English court.

The trio, and their agent, Mazhar Majeed, were charged with conspiring to bowl deliberate no-balls during the Lord's Test in 2010.

To their credit, Pakistan have not lost a Test series since then as Misbahul Haq has led them admirably, both on and off the field.

However, the prelude to this series -- shifted to the United Arab Emirates because of security concerns in Pakistan -- was overshadowed by talk of the scandal, much to the anger of Misbah.

"It's two years now and we have moved on from that difficult period," said Misbah, who was not selected for that 2010 tour.

"We want to focus on cricket. That is what we have been doing for a year and a half and that saga is past for us."

Misbah said all the talk was aimed at unsettling Pakistan.

"We are focused," said the 37-year-old. "We have done well in the last 18 months because of the focus and whoever is talking this wants us to lose that focus. But we remain attentive to the cause and that is to win the series."

Since the Lord's Test, Pakistan drew 0-0 against South Africa, beat New Zealand 1-0, drew 1-1 against the West Indies, beat Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka 1-0 and Bangladesh 2-0.

Misbah credits his players for the unbeaten run.

"The credit goes to the team and to players. After that difficult time, everybody stuck to the task, gathered their thoughts and everybody wanted to prove to the world that we are good players and a good team," said Misbah.

England captain Andrew Strauss, who led his team to a 3-1 win in that 2010 series, also showed resolve to move on.

"The spot-fixing stuff is something we're desperately keen to move on from," said Strauss. "What's happened before is water under the bridge and I hope both sides can play the game in the right spirit."



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan captain Misbahul Haq (L) and England captain Andrew Strauss pose with the trophy during a press conference in Dubai International Cricket Stadium at Dubai Sports City on Monday ahead of the first Test that starts today.

Swann and Monty Panesar, along with two seamers in James Anderson and Stuart Broad.

Panesar, who last played in the Cardiff Test of the 2009 Ashes series, warmed up with an eight-wicket haul in the second tour match.

England may have a few worries over the form of middle-order batsmen Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell and Eoin Morgan -- who all flopped in the lead-up games -- but Alastair Cook, Strauss and Jonathan Trott were among the runs.

Bangladesh

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The impressive line-up of Indian golfers includes the likes of Chirag Kumar, the Order of Merit winner of PGTI last season, Mukesh Kumar, Manav Jani, Vijay Kumar and Gaurav Ghei, an Asian tour winner.

The total prize money has been hiked this time to Tk 33 lakhs. The winner will receive an amount equivalent of Rs 3.23 lakh rupees, the second placed will get Rs 22.3 lakh and third placed will get Rs 1.25 lakh. The four-day meet will end on Friday, with 50 golfers to make it to the last two rounds.

K Mahmood Sattar, Managing Director and CEO of City Bank Limited handed over the cheque to the organisers to conclude the press conference. PGTI director Uttam Singh Mundy, Bangladesh Golf Federation's development member Brigadier general Salim Akhter (ret'd) and Rizwan Bin Farouq, Managing Director of event management company Riz Events were present among others.

Awaiting Ajmal teesra



AFP, Dubai

Pakistan all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez raised the excitement over the mystery delivery that off-spinner Saeed Ajmal wants to unveil against England in the first Test starting on Tuesday, saying it is "unique".

Ajmal, who took the most Test wickets in 2011 with 50, declared last month he will unveil a mystery delivery against England and Hafeez said he has played that delivery in the nets and found it different.

"Yes, I have played his delivery in the nets. It's a bit different and he has worked a lot on this in the last six-eight months. He has not bowled it internationally, so it will be a bit different and exciting," said Hafeez.

Hafeez, himself an off-spinner, refused to give more details.

"I can't tell more about it, he can better tell you. You will judge it when he bowls that, I don't want to reveal that. He has this new weapon and has command over it and has called it the 'teesra' [third one]," said Hafeez.

Former Pakistan off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq invented a unique delivery that he

named 'doosra' (second one) -- a delivery that is bowled with the normal off-spin action but turns the opposite way.

Hafeez said Ajmal has improved his skills through this new delivery.

"Because of his extraordinary work [on the delivery] ... I must leave it for him to bowl rather than I reveal anything, and I wish him success in this delivery. Every person has that ability to improve his skill and he has done that," said Hafeez.

"I don't know how difficult it will be for others. I have played him as a bowler for the last eight, nine years so it will be something new in cricket."

England batting coach Graham Gooch on Wednesday played down the hype over Ajmal's mystery delivery, saying it was no concern for England's batsmen.

Hafeez said Pakistan have the edge over England in spin bowling.

"We have an edge in the spin bowling as our spinners -- Ajmal and Abdul Rehman -- are world-class bowlers and conditions helped our slow bowlers here last year," said Hafeez.

Both Pakistan and England are likely to enter the first Test with two spinners, with Hafeez providing Pakistan an extra option in the slow bowling department.

Bring them in India!



AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket chief gave a robust defence of the national team Monday after the humiliating Test losses in Australia, saying players would soon set the record straight on home soil.

"Australia played better in their home conditions, it will be different when they come to India," Narayanaswamy Srinivasan, president of the under-fire Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), said.

"New Zealand is coming to India next and that will be followed by England and Australia. We will beat these three teams on our own soil. They cannot beat us here and we will feel very happy," he told the Press Trust of India news agency.

Australia smashed India by an innings and 37 runs inside three days in the third Perth Test on Sunday to clinch the four-match series, after winning in Melbourne by 122 runs and Sydney by an innings and 68 runs.

It was India's seventh successive Test loss abroad, following their 4-0 rout in England last year, in a dismal run that has taken the shine off their limited-overs World Cup victory at home last April.

Srinivasan, who owns the Chennai Super Kings franchise in the Indian Premier League, cited the example of India's 5-0 rout of England in a one-day series last October.

"England won in England, but they came here within a month and lost 5-0," he said. "After our loss in England, I had said we will beat them when they visit India. That's what happened."

Dhanmondi

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Abahani manager Satyjit Das Rupu.

Abahani are going to field their best eleven with defenders Wali Faisal, Nasirul Islam, forward Lucky Paul ready to take the field along with speedy winger Zahid Hossain, who will play his first match of the season after serving a three-match ban.

Sheikh Jamal coach Saiful Bari Titu said, "I am expecting a competitive game but we will first try not to concede any goals and then avail the opportunities that come our way."

The former Bangladesh assistant coach is also worried over his strikers, who could hardly prove them in the previous matches as they had scored only three goals and conceded two goals in three matches.

Muktis, BJMC in semis

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yet again managed to find only the bar with three minutes to go in extra-time.

Thankfully the Nigerian's luck improved in the shoot-out and Muktijoddha managed to find their way out of a difficult spot.

In the day's first match, Team BJMC showed that they were only going from strength to strength with an accomplished defeat of Rahmatganj MFS.

Team BJMC created chances at will in an attacking formation with Nigerian Ajagun Abdul Rasheed and Guinean Ismael Bangoura playing upfront and veterans Alfaz Ahmed and Abul Hossain on either flank.

And it was Rasheed who gave them the lead in the 17th minute beating goalkeeper Shakil on the second attempt after being fed by Alfaz.

Not to be left behind, his partner Bangoura doubled the lead in the 29th minute

with a header that owed a lot to good work by winger Abul who got past two defenders. And the striking combined just before half-time as Rasheed slotted home from a Bangoura cut-back.

Rahmatganj pulled a goal back late in the piece through Idris, but it was nothing more than scant consolation against a side made up of experienced veterans eager for one last hurrah.

Shooters

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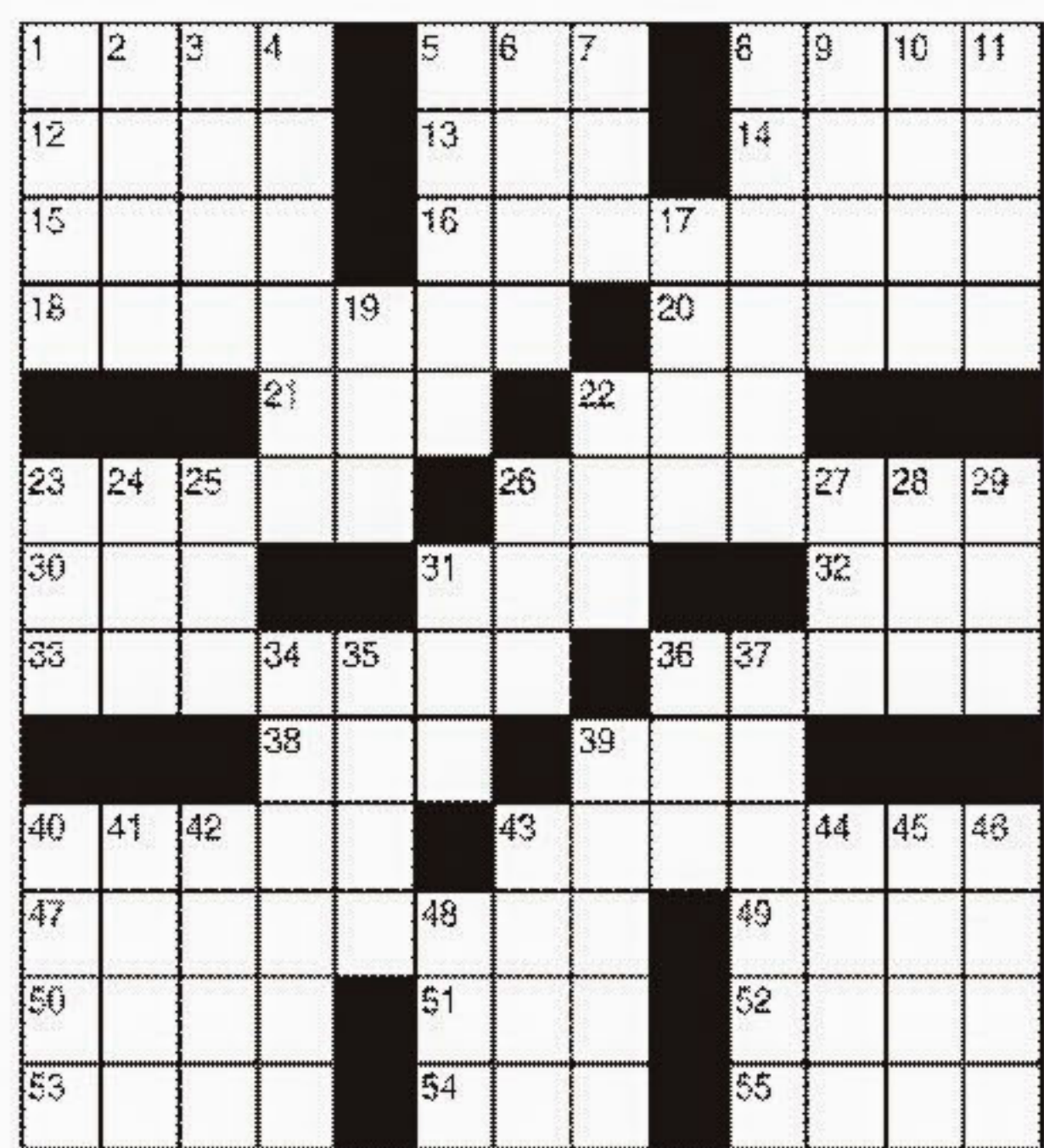
China's Weiyi Wang (693.7 points) won silver and bronze medals respectively.

Chandan's partner Rajman Ali went through a bitter experience to finish 46th out of 50 shooters in the same event after scoring 574 points. Armin Asha also became 43rd in the 10m Air Pistol event with a score of 361.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Dispatch a dragon 5 Pharm. watchdog org. 8 Spades or hearts 12 Former larva 13 Writer Fleming 14 Leading man? 15 CEO, e.g. 16 Poisonous metallic element 18 "— Overcome" 20 In a proper way 21 Attempt 22 Eggs 23 Inter-section 26 Green onion 30 Tavern 31 Jewel 32 Rage 33 Not deep 36 Moist poultry 38 Ump's call 39 Scoundrel 40 Butter substitutes 43 Braided bread 47 Thurgood of the Supreme Court 49 Tittle 50 Rim 51 Dove's call 52 Siblings' biz abbr. 53 Night light? 54 Optical organ 55 Ninth mo. DOWN 1 Jet forth 2 Sumptuousness 3 Tarzan's pals' essences 4 America's Cup contenders 5 In a proper way 6 Willy Wonka's creator 7 Literary collection 8 Female friend 9 Mine entrance 10 Manhandle 11 TV trophy 17 Volcanic outflow 19 They're between 25 Manmouse link 26 Stitch 27 Fleur-de— 28 Table scrap 29 Shirt shape 31 Understood 34 Untie 35 Thriving 36 Sheep's call 37 Extemporizes 39 Actress Sevigny 40 Portent 41 Stow cargo 42 As a result 43 Satiated 44 Traditional tales 45 On 46 Own, Biblically 48 Expert

SLOP MOP MICE HIVE IRE AMOK AMES CREAMPIE MARTYR LIBELS LAOS DOR NEVERDIE SIFT AYE DONNE ABE YEGG TELLALIE ERA WISP ACTORS VEILED BLACKRTIE EERO LATE URN CAGE EWER BAS ENOS



CRYPTOQUIP

GY Z OAZNN BXRBRNZDT BRZDTP BZQPV BRATO YCRA Z BTCDZGQ WTCAZQ BGDV, AGWXD GD KT Z KRQQ-KRQ? Yesterday's Cryptoquip: GROUP OF SNAKELIKE FISH WHO ARE OUT PRACTICING THEIR ROLLER-SKATING SKILLS: EELS ON WHEELS. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals I