

Sachin surprise for Yuvraj

AFP, New Delhi

Indian World Cup hero Yuvraj Singh, who is recovering after cancer treatment, received a boost when batting superstar Sachin Tendulkar visited him in London.

The duo met for an hour at an apartment of Yuvraj's friend on Wednesday, the Press Trust of India news agency said Friday, adding the all-rounder got a warm embrace from Tendulkar and they posed for photographs.

Tendulkar, the world's leading scorer in both Test and one-day cricket, wished Yuvraj a speedy recovery and an early return to the game.

Yuvraj was discharged on March 18 from a hospital in the United States, where he had been undergoing chemotherapy for a malignant tumour between his lungs.

Thousands of well-wishers, including US cycling great Lance Armstrong, have sent messages to the 30-year-old Yuvraj, who is known for his aggressive batting and disciplined spin bowling.

Yuvraj, who has scored 8,051 runs in 274 one-dayers and 1,775 runs in 37 Tests since making his international debut in 2000, is expected to return to the field in May.

Shakib

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ever since making his international debut in 2006. He had about three months off in 2008, a few months in early 2009 and, more recently, a break from mid-August to mid-October in 2009, between an away ODI series against Zimbabwe and a domestic Twenty20 tournament. Ever since, Shakib has risen significantly in world rankings and has grown in stature as an international cricketer by playing in the county championship for Worcestershire and the IPL for the Kolkata franchise. This apart, he has turned out in several domestic competitions in Bangladesh.

"I have played a lot of cricket, I need a break. I have some stuff of my own to take care of," Shakib said. "To play good cricket, one needs to stay away from cricket too."

Milon fails

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Army won the bronze in compound bow individual event.

In the Bamboo Bow single event, Alamgir Mia of Bangladesh Ansar & VDP won the gold medal while Namta Hazong of the same team won gold medal in the women's event.

Bangladesh Krira Shikha Protishtan (BKSP) won both gold in men's and women's team events beating Bangladesh Ansar & VDP in the finals. Bangladesh Army Archery Association and Wahed Archery Club won bronze medals in men's and women's events respectively.

Superb

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"I've been struggling with distance in the last couple of years so I decided to try an American coach (Todd Jones) in Florida to help me. I went for a week and it was great for my game," said Siddikur, who finished fifth at the SAIL-SBI Open last month.

Overnight leader and defending champion Anirban Lahiri of India struggled to get his round going as he returned with a 75 to lie in tied 17th place.

The halfway cut was set at five-over-par 149 with a total of 65 players making the weekend rounds.



PHOTO: AFP

Russian top seed Maria Sharapova celebrates after beating Dane Caroline Wozniacki in the Sony Ericsson Open semifinal in Key Biscayne on Thursday.

Maria into Miami final

Tennis

AFP, Miami

Three-time runner-up Maria Sharapova booked her second straight Miami final Thursday, rallying to beat disgruntled Caroline Wozniacki and set up a title clash with Agnieszka Radwanska.

Sharapova clinched a 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 semifinal victory over the Dane after two hours, 34 minutes, the match ending in acrimony as Wozniacki objected to the chair umpire's overrule of a call to Sharapova's benefit on match point.

World number four Radwanska's 6-4, 6-2 victory over Marion Bartoli was more straightforward, but included an injury to the seventh-seeded French player as well as a power outage that held up proceedings in the second set.

"For sure one of the weirdest matches, especially the lights," said Poland's Radwanska, who led 4-2 in the second set when the court went dark.

"You're really focused on the match and really want to finish in two sets. Suddenly, the lights go off."

She kept her concentration and returned to finish off Bartoli, who reached the semifinals by handing world number one Victoria Azarenka her first defeat of 2012.

A day after that triumph, Bartoli was hindered by a left thigh injury and had 35 unforced errors, failing to hold serve once.

Radwanska's reward was a meeting with Sharapova, who has won seven of their eight encounters.

"I'm just going to try to play aggressive and mix everything," Radwanska said. "We'll see what's going to work."

Sharapova was serving for the match and up 40-30 when her second serve was called

long -- a call overruled by the chair umpire, who ordered the point replayed.

Wozniacki did not like it, but was out of video challenges.

Sharapova stepped up to serve again, working her way into position to put away a forehand for the victory.

Wozniacki, who declined to shake hands with the chair umpire after the match, said it did not matter that television replays showed he was correct.

"I think when the ball is so close that I think he should give her a chance to challenge at least when I don't have any challenges," Wozniacki said.

"She was going to challenge it, anyways. So if it shows it's good, it's good. If it shows it's out, it's out. The ball was so close that it might as well have been out."

Sharapova said she would have certainly challenged the call if the umpire had not overruled it.

"It is a tough situation to be in because it is close to the end of the match and both of us fought so hard for over two hours and you don't want the match to end like that," she said.

Sharapova is now a perfect 4-0 in semifinals in Miami -- but 0-3 in finals.

She was delighted to have a chance to end that run.

"It's always disappointing to lose in the finals, but it's part of the career," Sharapova said of her near-misses in Miami. "I'm happy that I gave myself another chance to go out there and try to change that."

"It would just be meaningful to me because I have come to this tournament for so many years, ever since I was a young girl," said Sharapova, who recalled coming to the event as a spectator as a youngster.

"I have always just dreamt of playing on this court let alone being in the finals of it. It would just be really meaningful to me."

Djokovic downs Ferrer

Tennis

AFP, Miami

World number one Novak Djokovic booked a semifinal showdown with Juan Monaco at the Miami Masters on Thursday, holding off a determined David Ferrer of Spain 6-2, 7-6 (7/1).

"It's always going to tough against David, he's one of the greatest competitors on the circuit," said Serbia's Djokovic, winner of the last three Grand Slams. "I didn't want to get to the third set because physically he's always there."

Defending champion Djokovic opened the match playing superb tennis, dictating the rallies and giving fifth-seeded Ferrer little opening and at one point winning 13 straight points.

He pocketed the first set in just 32 minutes and broke Ferrer in the first game of the second before the tenacious Spaniard turned the tables.

Ferrer broke back and was holding his own against the world's top player until a

loose service effort from the Spaniard saw Djokovic break for a 5-4 lead and a chance to serve out the match.

Ferrer denied him as they battled to the tie-breaker, where Djokovic claimed a quick advantage as Ferrer swatted an ill-judged forehand into the net to fall behind on his serve on the first point.

Djokovic was firmly in control from there as he advanced to a meeting with Monaco, who celebrated his 28th birthday by surprising eighth-seeded American Mardy Fish 6-1, 6-3.

"I can't believe it," said Monaco, the 21st seed. "I have a lot of emotions, it is good to celebrate this way, playing unbelievable tennis on my birthday."

"Every shot I wanted to play I did. It was a perfect match for me. I returned well and then I served very, very good."

Fish broke Monaco in the sixth game of the second set to make it 3-3 but Monaco responded by winning three straight, closing it out on the first of three match points

with a backhand drop shot.

This is Monaco's ninth appearance in Miami but the first time he has reached the semis.

Fish said Monaco's all-around game was just too much for him.

"He did a lot of things well and I think more than anything else, he shrunk the court extremely well with his movement and that's why I think you saw a ton of errors from me," the American said. "I was pressing a lot just because he wasn't giving me anything."

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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Independence Cup

Volleyball

Bangladesh Army clinched the KFC Pizza Hut Independence Cup Volleyball Tournament with a 3-1 win over Bangladesh Navy in the final at the Volleyball Stadium yesterday. Bangladesh Air Force finished third beating Boarder Guard Bangladesh.

Broad out of Test, tour

AFP, Colombo

England seamer Stuart Broad was on Friday ruled out of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka with a calf strain and will immediately fly home, dealing a further blow to the tourists.

The 25-year-old is also a doubt for the Indian Premier League, which starts next week, where he has signed up for Kings XI Punjab.

Broad played in the first Test in Galle, which England lost by 75 runs, despite struggling with a sprain in his left ankle. He suffered the calf injury during the match.

"Broad has been ruled out of the final Test against Sri Lanka after a scan today confirmed a right calf strain," England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement.

"Broad will return to the UK immediately for further assessment before beginning a rehabilitation programme which will determine his availability for all cricket, including the IPL."

England will not seek a replacement for Broad for the Test starting at the P. Sara Oval in Colombo on Tuesday, leaving Tim Bresnan and Steven Finn in the reckoning to fill the vacant spot.

England need a win to stay on top of the Test rankings. A draw or a defeat will see South Africa take over as the number one side.

Broad dismissed dangerous opener Tillakaratne Dilshan in both innings at Galle, his only two wickets in the match, and scored 28 and five not out with the bat.

Bekele sets the benchmark

AFP, Paris

Ethiopian distance great Kenenisa Bekele added another record to his glittering career this week when he set a new benchmark for the most consecutive days holding both the 5,000m and 10,000m world records.

On Wednesday Bekele notched up 2,850 days as the combined record holder, surpassing the previous benchmark of 2,849 days set by legendary Finn Paavo Nurmi in the 1920s.

The 29-year-old Bekele set a 10,000 world record of 26:20.31 on June 8, 2004 to go along with his 5,000 record of 12:37.35 recorded eight days earlier.

Nurmi added a 10,000m world record of 30:06.1 on August 31, 1924 to his 5,000m record of 14:28.2 from June 19 the same year.

He held both until another Finn, Lauri Lehtinen, ran 14:16.9, 2,849 days later.

Bekele will still be chasing another Nurmi record since 'the flying Finn' had a second double streak of 560 days from September 12, 1922 to March 25, 1924.

That combined total of 3,409 days won't be surpassed until October 9, 2013.

Only nine men have simultaneously held both 5,000m and 10,000m world records. Haile Gebrselassie holds the distinction of having both the most reigns (four) and the shortest reign (three days).

All eyes on Strauss

Cricket

AFP, Galle

England captain Andrew Strauss faces close scrutiny of his batting and leadership skills as he attempts to keep his spin-shattered team on top of the world Test rankings.

England, who toppled India from the mantle with a memorable 4-0 whitewash on seaming wickets at home last year, have come unstuck on the spinner-friendly tracks of Asia over the last three months.

The 75-run defeat to Sri Lanka in the first Test in Galle on Thursday was England's fourth consecutive loss, following the embarrassing 3-0 hammering by Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates.

If Saeed Ajmal and Abdur Rehman wrecked England in the UAE with a combined haul of 43 wickets in the series, Sri Lanka's Rangana Herath and Suraj Randiv grabbed 18 of the 20 wickets in Galle.

England are already assured of a bonus of \$175,000 from the International Cricket Council as the number one side on the cut-off date of April 1, but their future at the top remains perilous.

Strauss' men will slip to number two behind South Africa if they fail to win the second and final Test in Colombo from Tuesday.

Among mounting concern for a badly bruised England is the form of their captain. Strauss has now gone 23 innings without adding to his 19 Test centuries, averaging a poor 28.52, and has managed just one three-figure knock in his last 48 innings.

He made 26 and 27 in Galle, falling both times to Herath, but the left-hander put on a brave face.

"I feel in good form, but you're judged on your performances and I have not performed well enough," the 35-year-old admitted.

"My job in the side is to score runs, the same as any other batsman, and I have not scored as many as I would have liked in the last 12 months or so."

"That's very frustrating, but hopefully I will put it right next week."

Strauss admitted his team's inability to put runs on the board had proved costly, both against Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

England's batting coach and former Test skipper Graham Gooch backed Strauss to come good as a batsman and saw no threat to his captaincy.

"As far as I am concerned, Andrew Strauss is the best guy to captain England," Gooch said on Friday. "He is also one of the two best opening batsmen in the country along with Alastair Cook."

"I have every confidence in him. I see the passion in him. I see the commitment every day on the training pitch trying to improve his game."

"There have been plenty of captains down the years who have struggled. What we have to do is to remain faithful to all our players and believe in their ability," Gooch said.

The Galle Test was a tale of missed opportunities for England after they had Sri Lanka on the ropes at 15-3 in the first four overs of the match.

In the end, the fourth innings target of 340, never achieved before by England in their Test history, proved too much for the tourists, who were dismissed for 264 despite a wonderful 112 from Jonathan Trott.

"Trott did not deserve to be on the losing side," Strauss said, after the last six wickets tumbled for 31 runs on a wearing wicket.

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene was candid when asked if England's batsmen had a problem in playing spin.

"It's not just about spin bowling, but how you play in certain conditions," he said. "It's about adapting. They have lost four in a row now, so maybe they do have a problem."

Wasim bats for Aamer return

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's former bowling great Wasim Akram swung behind Mohammad Aamer on Thursday, saying he deserves to be forgiven and allowed back into international cricket after serving a ban for spot-fixing.

"I think we should move on in Aamer's case, forgive him as he has served his punishment for the mistake he committed and allow the youngster another chance," Wasim told AFP.

The 19-year-old Aamer was released from a British jail after serving half of his six-month sentence for spot-fixing at the Lord's Test against England in 2010.

Aamer bowled deliberate no-balls, together with his new-ball partner Mohammad Asif. Pakistan's then captain Salman Butt and agent Mazhar Majeed were found guilty of contriving the no-balls in exchange for cash.

Butt and Asif are still serving 30- and 12-month jail terms respectively. The International Cricket Council (ICC) also banned the three players for a minimum of five years.

In his first interview since his release,

which was broadcast last week, Aamer accused Butt of tricking him into taking part in the scandal.

"As a cricket-loving nation we must forgive him (Aamer). He has done his time and once he serves his ban he should be allowed back into international cricket as he is one of the most talented bowlers," said Wasim.

Aamer was likened to Wasim during the 2010 England tour and Wasim himself admitted Aamer was a better bowler than he was aged 19.

"Lots of people including Imran Khan praised his talent and he was the hottest property in international cricket until he committed that mistake," said Wasim, who played 104 Tests and 352 one-dayers for Pakistan.

Indian batting legend Rahul Dravid, who retired from international cricket this month, also backed Aamer's return. But England's Kevin Pietersen said no player caught spot-fixing should be allowed to play again.

"If Pakistan is fine, the ICC is fine, then it doesn't matter what others say. Aamer should play once he serves his ban," said Wasim.

The Pakistan Cricket Board said this month that they would liaise with the ICC to start a rehabilitation process for Aamer and consider him for selection once he completes his ban.

League in another quandary

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eleven not to take the field after they had completed the first innings of the game.

A war of words ensued with a Mohammedan official claiming that the document shown as the clearance was forged. The debate continued and four hours later, the match referee announced that Victoria were the winners since Abahani had "refused to play".

With their action, Abahani joined Mohammedan and Victoria in the clearance conflict that was, according to some, an internal issue to start off with. Now the defending league champions have been threatened with consequences if a reversal is not forthcoming. Mohammedan will certainly not budge and neither will Victoria.

All of this obviously means one thing: the continuation of the stand-off, if the CCDM doesn't stamp their authority on the matter.

In the last incident involving Surjo Tarun's expulsion from the Premier League back in early February, there was a cry of iniquitous influence in the decision-making process. There were whisperings of certain board directors making a late appearance when the CCDM sat for deciding the Dhanmondi-based club's fate. The resignation of its chairman was a fair giveaway of the allegations of outside pressure that has been doing the rounds.

This time however, the CCDM bosses are dealing with fire; Abahani, Mohammedan and the moneyed Victoria will be hard to placate with any decision as one way or the other, one of the parties will be slighted.

What the CCDM will rue is the lack of professionalism they have practiced throughout the season. If they had preceded from the past, a decision against the bigwigs would have been easier to take.

Spring 08 soccer champs

SPORTS REPORTER

Spring 08 became champions of the BRAC University inter-semester football tournament at the Military Museum field yesterday.

They beat Spring 09 by 4-1 margin after the game went to penalties following a 1-1 scoreline till extra time.

Nipun opened the scoring in the game for Spring 09 before Maruf equalised for the eventual champions.

The trophies and awards were given away by the registrar of BRAC University, Ishfaq Elahi Chowdhury.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Players of Spring 08 receive the champions trophy of BRAC University's inter-semester football tournament from Ishfaq Elahi Chowdhury, the registrar of the university, at the Military Museum field yesterday.