



PHOTO: AFP
Serbia's tennis world No 1 Novak Djokovic hits a backhand return during his Madrid Masters match against Daniel Jimeno-Traver of Spain at the Magic Box Sports Complex in Madrid on Tuesday.

Premier tennis begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Gulshan Youth Club Northern Hatcheries Premier Tennis Tournament 2012 begins today at the Gulshan Youth Club ground with hosts taking on Uttara Club in the opening match. A total of eight teams, split into two groups, are taking part in the nine-day meet on robin league basis matches.

President of Gulshan Youth Club Rafes Alam Chowdhury disclosed the details of the tournament at a press conference at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday.

T20 CAPTAINCY Sarfraz votes for Hafeez

ANI, Islamabad

Former Pakistan fast bowler Sarfraz Nawaz has backed Mohammad Hafeez to be the country's new Twenty20 captain, replacing Misbahul Haq, who is unlikely to play a part in the shortest version of cricket for the national team. Nawaz also asked the Pakistan Cricket Board to make Hafeez the vice-captain of the one-day and the Test teams to prepare him for the captaincy role in the future.

"It is the high time to groom a captain for Twenty20 and according to my opinion, Hafeez is the right choice while Misbah's leadership should be curtailed to one-day and Test matches," The Nation quoted Nawaz, as saying. "Hafeez should also be appointed the vice-captain of one-day and Test teams because it is the right way to prepare him for leadership. Change always takes place and if it carries out at right time it helps in building a team and a captain," he added.

Nawaz said it is essential to have a young Twenty20 captain, and ruled out Shahid Afridi from the captaincy race. "All-rounder Shahid Afridi is not in the run of captaincy as the player has announced earlier that he is not interested to lead the side. Afridi should concentrate on improving his performance and it will be better if he confines himself to Twenty20 cricket only," he said.

"Our target is to grasp a fine place in the point-table through consistent performances as we have overcome our weakness through four foreign players," said Yousuf. Team BJMC coach Jakaria Babu said that their first two matches against Sheikh Jamal and Brothers Union are the most important in the title race. He was optimistic about producing similar performances to what they put up in the first leg.

Novak slams blue clay

Manages first round win in Madrid



AFP, Madrid

Novak Djokovic scraped and slid to an opening victory at the Madrid Masters on Tuesday, then let loose with a blistering appraisal of the event's controversial blue clay courts. "That was not tennis, either I need football shoes or some advice on how to play on this court," said the Serb top seed after beating Spain's number 137 Daniel Gimeno-Traver 6-2, 2-6, 6-3.

"I cannot find the words to describe this court. It's really tough to play like this on a centre court.

"We cannot change anything this year, but my first impressions are not good. I don't want to be the one complaining, but I say honestly what I feel.

"We need serious discussion about the future of this blue clay."

The blue-clay plan was put into action by the tournament's billionaire impresario Ion Tiriac, the man who brought catwalk models onto court as ball-girls in another experiment that has paid public relations dividends for the ATP-WTA Masters 1000.

But Djokovic says the differences with the red clay surface to which players are more accustomed are stark.

"This has no similarities with red clay, it's totally different," said Djokovic, winner of the 2011 edition over home hero Rafael Nadal. "It's much more slippery.

"The material of blue clay and red clay are different. When you slide on red clay you can feel when you stop. Here you are always slipping.

"Most players I've spoken to share the opinion that the court is slippery."

Djokovic said that even days of training made little difference. "Centre court is different from others I trained on. If it affects me next week in Rome, we will see.

"I don't know how it will turn out in my next match. But I'm here to win. This is my work and I take things about this situation very seriously."

Djokovic said the players were overlooked in the decision to trial the controversial material.

"Player opinions have to be heard and considered to understand what is going on in our tennis world. This event and the decision to change to blue is an example of players not being considered and heard.

"Their opinions are ignored. I hope this will change in the future.

"I've not found any woman or man who is enthusiastic about this surface. I haven't heard any one say they like it."

CA has no hand in fiasco

AFP, Sydney

Cricket Australia (CA) Wednesday denied having anything to do with Mitchell Starc being thrown out of Britain, as the fast bowler attempted to play down the visa problems that saw him deported.

The left-armed was due to leave London Tuesday evening with his English side Yorkshire, coached by former Australia fast bowler Jason Gillespie, blaming either Cricket Australia or Starc's agent for problems with his paperwork.

The 22-year-old arrived at Heathrow Airport at the weekend and was initially cleared to remain, but will not now make his Yorkshire debut against Gloucestershire on Wednesday.

Cricket Australia said the issue had nothing to do with them.

"Mitchell is on annual leave and decided to organise a short-term contract with Yorkshire. It has absolutely nothing to do with us," a spokesman told AFP.

"We have sent plenty of people to England and know all the requirements. Saying that, we have made it clear that if Mitchell needs our help, we are happy to do that."

While Cricket Australia have been blamed by some, Yorkshire chairman Colin Graves has also fingered Starc's agent for the "fiasco", according to the Guardian newspaper.

Starc was keen to play down the embarrassment as he prepared to fly out of Britain.

"Well round the world here we go... Off to aus now," he tweeted, apparently from Heathrow.

Father took Raza here

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan left-arm spinner Raza Hasan has said his foray into cricket began only because of his father, who insisted that he master the sport.

In an interview to Pakpassion.net, Raza spoke of how his interest in cricket grew, his experiences with the national team, domestic cricket and his international aspirations.

Raza, 19, who hails from Sialkot, has represented Pakistan Under-19s against Zimbabwe, and also got slotted in for the Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand in 2010. His performances there led to his selection for Pakistan's England tour 2010 where he replaced Pakistani leg-spin bowler Danish Kaneria.

Speaking of how his interest grew in the sport of cricket, Raza said, "Initially, I wasn't really interested in cricket but my father insisted on taking me to practice and having me practice at the local college ground. I started to develop an interest in the game by watching all these players in action."

"There was Shoaib Malik and his younger brother who also played in the same ground. Later on, all of the aforementioned went off to play in well known clubs in Sialkot after getting their basic cricket coaching from Mithoo bhai. So, I started my cricket there," he added.

Raza said that he always wanted to be a fast bowler, and was supervised under his teacher Imtiaz Ahmed, who claimed to turn him into a quality left-arm spinner in a span of 3 years.

"The teachers can see things you can't and in my case, my teacher really helped me out. He would take me to another ground if there was no match in our area and insist that I bowl 6 or 7 overs. On our own grounds, he would collect some money, buy a couple of cricket balls and organize a highly competitive game between us local boys," he revealed.

Raza has lifted the domestic T20 title on three occasions and a call to play for international cricket seems likely on cards provided he continues to improve both his bowling and batting.

Timely

FROM PAGE 16
owed a combined 500,000 pounds in unpaid wages from the BPL... None have been paid their full fees with a fraction having received up to 50 per cent of the money owed."

The BCB are taking such media attention seriously, Ashraf said.

The board also received firm assurances that the dues of Bangladeshi cricketers will be settled within 31 May 2012.

Britain deports Starc



AFP, London

Australia left-arm quick Mitchell Starc has been deported from Britain, with visa problems preventing him from making his debut for English county Yorkshire on Wednesday.

Yorkshire, coached by former Australia fast bowler Jason Gillespie, are blaming Cricket Australia officials for problems with Starc's paperwork.

The 22-year-old Starc, who arrived at Heathrow Airport last weekend and was initially cleared to remain, will not now make his Yorkshire debut in their County Championship Second Division match against Gloucestershire at Bristol on Wednesday.

But the bowler himself was confident of being able to return to England in time for next week's match against Yorkshire.

"Well that's a first! Being deported from England...surely nothing else can go wrong can it!" Starc wrote on his Twitter account on Tuesday.

"Visa issue. Incorrect communication from Aus. Will be straight back to UK ASAP once sorted. In time for next Yorkshire game."

"The Yorkshire have been brilliant to me...disappointed I won't get to play tomorrow but good luck to the lads!"

A Yorkshire spokesman said earlier Tuesday: "There was an error with the initial paperwork which the club are trying to sort out."

"We hope to have it completed by this afternoon. If not it is unlikely Starc will be able to play tomorrow and may have to return back to Australia."

Starc was due to begin an initial five-week

Rudisha against Bolt?

AFP, Doha



champion Usain Bolt.

Rudisha, the world 800m champion and also the world record holder, is one of Kenya's main Olympic gold medal hopes, but has admitted he could run in the relay should the squad advance in the British capital this summer.

The chances of Bolt adding the 4x400m to his already-charged programme of the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay is highly unlikely, although the Jamaican did say back in November that he would be available if he got the call-up.

But Rudisha allowed himself a brief moment of fantasy before thoughts turned to setting his standard at Friday's opening Diamond League meeting here.

"It would be good, you know!" he said, laughing. "People have been saying for some time that it would be a very interesting race, having Usain and me doing the last leg together."

"It would be great seeing two world record holders in different events competing. That would be our meet point because I'd come down to 400m and he would go up from the 100m and 200m."

"So we'd meet in the middle, it'd be great, a very interesting race."

And who would emerge victorious? Rudisha avoided a direct answer with the alacrity of a well-oiled politician, instead focusing on the potential merits of the "spectacle".

"Usain Bolt is fast, he has speed. I don't have that speed. I have a little bit of speed and my 'race'. It would fun and enjoyable to watch for the fans," the towering 23-year-old said.

deal to help offset the controversial departure of seamer Ajmal Shahzad, who joined county champions Lancashire, Yorkshire's arch cross-border rivals, on loan until the end of the season on Tuesday after being controversially released by Headingley officials last week.

The departure of the 26-year-old Shahzad, who has played one Test and 11 one-day internationals for England, was a shock as he had taken eight wickets in three first-class matches at an average of 26.25 for Yorkshire this season.

But Yorkshire chairman Colin Graves said Shahzad had to go after refusing to follow Gillespie's instructions.

"Jason's come in with a totally new regime and the player's still not happy so we can't keep changing the backroom and all the rest of it."

"Our guys wanted a disciplined situation like England do when they're playing now and it works very well," added Graves.

"He [Shahzad] didn't see that. He wanted to have the opportunity to be his own man, bang it in when he wants to bang it in and bowl bouncers when he wants to bowl bouncers."

"The captain, the coach and everybody else didn't want that situation, especially at this time of year where we've got seaming wickets and all the rest of it -- it's disciplined bowling that counts."

"We've put a lot of effort and a lot of resource into Ajmal and we thought he'd be here for the rest of his career."

"We're sad to see him go but at the end of the day, there's no point in keeping him here if he's unhappy."

Simmons eyes England ODIs



IANS, Port of Spain

Fit-again West Indies batsman Lendl Simmons is targeting a comeback against England in the upcoming limited-overs series next month.

The right-handed stroke-maker returned to action in the domestic competition here last month after undergoing surgery in February for a fractured finger suffered during the Regional Four-Day Championship.

Last week, he stroked 127 for his local club Ceramic Merryboys and says he hopes he can do enough to convince regional selectors.

"I see no reason to be left out of the English series. I'm making some big scores once again and I think I have done a lot to deserve selection," he told the Trinidad NewsDay.

"I just want to keep playing to the best of my ability and move from strength to strength. As a cricketer, I want to do my best representing my club, country and the region."

Simmons has played eight Tests and 36 one-day internationals (ODI), but has not played since December when he faced India in the ODIs there.

He has emerged as one of the side's most consistent one-day batsmen in recent times, and has scored a hundred and two half-centuries in his last seven innings.

West Indies play England in a three-Test series, starting May 17, before the three one-dayers and a Twenty20 from June 16-24 and Simmons says he is eager to get into the team.

"I feel great. It's good to be fit and back to form once again. I was elated with my 127 against Wanderers recently because I want runs under my belt to make the One-Dayers and T20s in England," he said.

West Indies are expected to have a full strength squad for that tour with the estranged Chris Gayle, and Indian Premier League stars Sumil Narine, Kieron Pollard and Dwayne Bravo, all available for selection.

Legendary Mari

FROM PAGE 16
BJMC) and Mohammedan SC.

The brilliant forward also played in different tournaments in Malaysia, Hong Kong and China.

Mari played at the left wing position and formed a formidable trio with center forward Ashraf and right winger Kabir and won the hearts of millions of admirers.

He called time in 1969 after playing for Wanderers Club following injuries.

Apart from football, Mari was a regular member of the East Pakistan Volleyball team. He also won in the 100m and 200m sprint.

He was also awarded the National Sports Award in 1981 for his valuable contribution to country's sports. State minister for youth and sports Ahad Ali Sarker, Bangladesh Football Federation, Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association and Bangladesh Sports Press Association condoled the death of Mari and expressed their deep sympathy to the members of the deceased's family.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

- Early bird?
- Put an end to
- Move like a butterfly
- Second person
- Tittle
- Old Italian money
- Eternally, in verse
- Use a swizzle stick
- Many millennia
- Sloshed
- Wet
- Wiggler
- Rotation duration
- Untamed
- "Holy cow!"
- Peach stone
- Off
- Car wash option
- Apportion
- \$ dispenser
- Con-cealed

35 Halt

- Shriner's chapeau
- Proscription
- Quite serious
- Elliptical
- Start over
- Curved path
- Missile shelter
- Farmer's home?
- Homer's interjection
- Valhalla VIP
- Terrier type
- Past

DOWN

- Kept tabs on
- No stay-at-home
- Mentor
- Ebert's longtime partner
- Sum
- Elevator name
- Seeming contradiction
- Like some piecrust
- Stead
- Press agent?
- Sherman, for one
- Approach

- 2004 horror movie
- Air safety org.
- Salamander
- Aries
- Bankroll
- Shell game item
- "Monty Python" opener
- Casual shirt
- Hogwarts alumni
- Carte
- The lady
- Wheedle
- Criminal
- Ineptly
- Mediocre
- "Meta-morphoses" writer
- Java neighbor
- Look for
- Arp's movement
- Piratic potation
- Reverberate

Solution time: 27 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

X Z O J C U A B S F I J C A P Q
F K C R F F S D B A G R H T H F I J U
O F B K C Z O D J P J O , M J
S D X P Q J U D A B P X G J O F
M J N N F M B J C .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THAT ARTIST IS HANDILY WINNING THE SKETCHING COMPETITION. I THINK HE'S CERTAINLY TOP DRAWER.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: M equals W