



China's tennis star Li Na hits a forehand return to Romania's Sorana Cirstea during their first round French Open match at the Roland Garros in Paris yesterday.

Azarenka survives a scare



AFP, Paris

Victoria Azarenka narrowly avoided becoming the first top seed to lose in the French Open first round on Monday.

World number one Azarenka had to come from a set and 4-0 down to defeat Italian world number 105 Alberta Brianti 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 6-2 and will face German qualifier Dinah Pfizenmaier for a place in the last 32.

But for much of her rollercoaster 2hr 16min battle with 32-year-old Brianti, who had never won a match in four previous main draw appearances at Roland Garros, Azarenka struggled.

Brianti was on the verge of a 5-0 lead in the second set when Azarenka sent down a second serve ace to stay in contention, the point proving to be the significant moment in the tie.

Australian Open champion Azarenka, who finished with 60 unforced errors, came into Roland Garros nursing a shoulder injury and it

appeared that she was heading for a shock exit until she reeled off 12 of the last 14 games.

"I started well but my game just collapsed," admitted 22-year-old Azarenka, twice a quarter-finalist in Paris.

"I tried to stay concentrated. I don't know how I got out of it."

Top seed Djokovic kicks off his bid for an historic Grand Slam later on Monday when he tackles Italian claycourter Potito Starace.

The Serb is just seven wins away from becoming only the third man to hold all four majors at the same time.

But the Wimbledon, US Open and Australian Open champion has never made a final in Paris, falling at the semi-finals on three occasions.

Meanwhile, defending women's champion Li Na of China advanced to the second round with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Romania's Sorana Cirstea, a quarter-finalist in 2009.

"I'll just try my best," Li said, when asked to rate her chances of a successful defence. "It's tough for me to stay at

the same level all the time."

Li will face either Barbora Zahlavova Strycova of the Czech Republic or France's Stephanie Foretz Gacon for a place in the last 32.

Women's 11th seed Vera Zvonareva withdrew from the tournament suffering from a right shoulder injury.

Kazakhstan's Sesil Karatantcheva, a 'lucky loser' from qualifying, took her place in the draw and defeated Hungary's Timea Babos.

Also heading for the exit was German 12th seed Sabine Lisicki who slumped to a 6-4, 6-3 defeat to America's Bethanie Mattek-Sands.

Australian veteran Lleyton Hewitt, a former world number one, lost 7-6 (7/2), 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 to Slovenia's Blaz Kavcic while Spanish 15th seed Feliciano Lopez retired from his match against French qualifier Florent Serra with a stomach strain.

American 10th seed John Isner, who took six-time champion Nadal to five sets in the first round last year, went through by beating Brazil's Rogerio Dutra Silva 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.

Cricket Kenya elections halted

AFP, Nairobi

Cricket Kenya (CK) were on Sunday prevented from holding national elections after their biggest affiliate Nairobi Provincial Cricket Association (NCPA) were barred from taking part, outgoing chairman Samir Inamdar confirmed.

Former CEO and national team captain Tom Tikolo won a court order on Friday restraining nine NCPA delegates from representing the branch at the polls, forcing the much-delayed elections to be postponed yet again.

"It's very disappointing that the whole process keeps being frustrated by people who don't want to see elections being held," said Inamdar.

"We didn't want to go against the court ruling. But we will keep an eye on Nairobi and we plan to take legal action against the branch for delaying the election process."

Only two branches - Coast and Rift Valley - attended the meeting where the outgoing chairman's and accounts' reports were read.

The election fiasco, comes as Kenyan cricket is reeling from reports that an unnamed former national player was being investigated by the International Cricket Council's Anti-Corruption Unit for spot-fixing at the last World Cup finals in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Siddikur's

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The qualifying event is played on 36 holes, over the two courses, to determine the 11 qualifiers, with a play-off held to decide the final places if necessary.

BKSP crowned champs

FROM PAGE 16

There were a lot of allegations against the Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF), who did not use the electronic timer. Also, there was no doctor, adequate judges, nor sufficient drinking water.

"I admit there might have been some loopholes but that was not a big problem," said BAF acting general secretary Manzur Morshed. "We will take a lesson from our mistakes."

"The electronic device was not used because the athletes are not used to it and there is a chance of being disqualified before the start of the run. That is why we decided not to use it," said Manzur adding that there were an adequate number of judges and enough drinking water.

But it has been seen that the senior athletes who have been training for SA Games played the judges' role.

Many alleged that the junior championships were being held in a day instead of the customary two days, though the meet was supposed to be held in March instead of the scorching heat of May.

"The venue was not avail-

Div-II h'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Old Bandura Nabin Setu Sangha earned second consecutive victory in the four-team super league of the Igloo Metropolis 2nd Division Men's Handball beating Star Sports by 30-26 goals at the Shaheed (Capt) M Mansoor Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday.

Rubel netted eight and Leon seven goals for the winners while Shimul scored nine and Shovon seven for the losing side.

In the day's other match, Flame Boys tasted defeated Quantum Foundation by 26-25 goals after trailing the first half by 11-14 goals.

Lotto sponsors

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like football.

"I was talking with my embassy colleagues and federation officials to organise a friendly football match among EU ambassadors, members of parliament and federation officials," said Giorgio Guglielmino, ambassador of Italy to Dhaka, at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

"I am not promising anything but there is possibility to organise a friendly match in Bangladesh as the Italian clubs tour Asia, especially in Japan to play friendly after the end of season and we may think of a stop-over of those teams in Bangladesh on their way to Japan or back from Japan," said Guglielmino.

Kazi Jamil Islam, managing director of Lotto's local agent of Express Leather Product Ltd, said they are very much interested in football and are planning to get involved with football events here.

"We have already started talks with four to five local clubs including Abahani to become their kit sponsors and also plan to sponsor a few local players which we already do in other places of the world," said Islam.

BFF's senior vice president Abdus Salam Murshedy hoped that the association with Lotto continues to grow and thanked them for sponsoring the U-22 team.

Federer equals Connors' record

AFP, Paris

Roger Federer kicked off his 50th straight major with a 6-2, 7-5, 6-3 win over Germany's Tomas Kamke at the French Open on Monday to equal Jimmy Connors' record of 233 Grand Slam match victories.

Federer, the record 16-time Grand Slam title winner, is now 233-35 lifetime at the majors.

Monday's win was also his 50th against 12 losses at Roland Garros having made his debut as a wildcard in 1999 where he lost to Australia's Pat Rafter in the first round.

Since that time, he has missed just one Grand Slam -- the 1999 US Open where he failed to qualify.

"I get a great deal of pleasure playing here. When I play well, the numbers come with me. It's great to have played and won here so often. I hope it continues," said Federer.

The Swiss star took victory over Kamke on a sixth match point and will next face either David Nalbandian of Argentina or Adrian Ungur of Romania.

Shah Rukh sorry for bad behaviour

AFP, New Delhi

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan has apologised for his "misbehaviour" at an Indian Premier League match in Mumbai when he tried to walk onto the ground after the game.

The actor, who co-owns the Kolkata Knight Riders team that won the tournament final on Sunday, wanted to take a group of youngsters including his daughter onto the Wankhede Stadium outfield after a match on May 16.

When a security guard stopped them, Khan argued angrily with officials for 10-15 minutes before finally giving up.

The 46-year-old star, who denied he was drunk, was banned from the stadium for five years.

"I want to apologise to the kids for my misbehaviour... I apologise to all who saw me differently. I shouldn't have behaved in that manner," he told reporters after the final in Chennai late Sunday.

Khan, one of the Bollywood film industry's most popular stars, last week pleaded guilty and agreed to pay a fine after he was seen smoking during an IPL match in Jaipur.

IPL largely a success

AFP, New Delhi

The scandal-prone Indian Premier League (IPL) remains cricket's most divisive tournament, but some thrilling action in front of packed houses has put immediate doubts over its future to rest.

When the gawdy Twenty20 event's fifth edition started last month, flagging crowds and signs of "cricket fatigue" among India's public, together with a welter of poor publicity, had raised questions about the tournament.

But by the time Kolkata Knight Riders beat the Chennai Super Kings to claim the title on Sunday, and despite damaging spot-fixing claims and a string of lurid headlines, the IPL had been hailed as a success.

"The fifth edition started under a cloud of controversies and crowd backlash, but apprehensions were soon swept aside as some command performances on the field was well-received by packed galleries," the Deccan Herald said.

The Indian Express estimated more than 160 million people watched the games on TV, two million tickets were sold worth \$36 million, and that the IPL brand valuation would rise from last year's estimate of 3.67 billion dollars.

"If the sense of fulfilment could be calculated, it would run into several billions of dollars," said N. Srinivasan, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which runs the event.

The positive assessments jar with some off-pitch developments, mainly the suspensions of five Indian players after a TV sting claimed to unearth evidence that no-balls could be arranged to order in the IPL.

The report targeted fringe players and provided no proof of corruption within IPL games, but it re-focused fears about betting, with India seen as the hub of illegal gambling on cricket.

Meanwhile Bollywood superstar Shahrukh Kahn dented his huge popularity

End of road for Gebrselassie



AFP, Hengelo

Ethiopian athletics legend Haile Gebrselassie failed to qualify for the London Olympics here on Sunday as he could only finish seventh in the 10,000 metres.

The 39-year-old two-time Olympic 10,000m champion - who had already failed to post a qualifying time for the marathon - admitted his hopes had been dashed after his disappointing performance against 12 of his compatriots.

Ethiopia were using this as a qualifier for the Olympics.

"The Games in London, is over for me," he told AFP.

"I ran a good race till the last lap. I felt good but I manifestly didn't have the speed to compete against my rivals.

"That's life. I am not disappointed," added Gebrselassie, whose epic defeat of Kenyan great Paul Tergat at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, his second Olympic title, is one of the great finishes of all time.

Indeed for the ever cheerful Ethiopian great it is to be his last track race.

"The 'spikes', it is finished for me. I am 39. I have failed to qualify for the Olympics. And there is a very strong younger generation in Ethiopia now.

"I tried to qualify for my fifth Olympics.

after becoming involved in an ugly stand-off with officials at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

Other incidents included allegations made to police -- and later dropped -- that Australian Luke Pomersbach of the Royal Challengers Bangalore had molested a woman and beaten up her fiance in a hotel room in New Delhi.

Separately, South African seamer Wayne Parnell and India spinner Rahul Sharma were questioned by police for their presence at a Mumbai hotel which was raided for being an alleged illegal rave party.

"Whatever is happening is neither cricket nor is it our culture," said former federal finance minister Yashwant Sinha, a member of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as the scandals dominated headlines.

"The sports ministry should intervene and make drastic changes in the IPL."

Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar, now a popular commentator, said the blame lay in the fact that the tournament was marketed as more than just a cricket tournament.

"The BCCI will realise that packaging the IPL as entertainment may not be such a good idea. It's got to be just sport," he said.

International wariness about the IPL was apparent when England's Kevin Pietersen, who plays for Delhi Daredevils, said he was "sick and tired" of defending his participation, and suggested other countries were jealous.

However, the attractions of last-ball winning sixes, extravagant switch-hitting and rapid-fire centuries seem to have trumped many concerns, at least in the minds of the Indian public.

The tournament was also not competing with any other major cricket events, unlike last year when it immediately followed the one-day World Cup which was co-hosted -- and won -- by India.

"The packed stadiums this year should silence all doubting Thomases," said the BCCI's Srinivasan.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 "— the night before ..."

5 Peace antithesis

8 Stage presentation

12 Rope material

13 Coloring

14 Queue

15 Banister

16 Ovum

17 One

18 Spread open

20 Bullets and such

22 Sched- ules

26 Reinforc- ing device

29 And so on (Abbr.)

30 Ambu- lance VIP

31 Solemn promise

32 Mono- kini's lack

33 Cougar

34 John's Yoko

35 — Lanka

36 One without a Y

37 Watches, e.g.

40 Mideast country

41 Tie on

45 Judy's daughter

47 Grecian vessel

49 Vicinity

50 Top pair, maybe

51 Aachen article

52 Heart of the matter

53 Unembel- lished

54 Plaything

Solution time: 25 mins.

55 Chows down

10 Singer DiFranco

11 Still

19 Whopper

21 PC alterna- tive

23 Inducing goose- flesh

24 Austen heroine

25 Ollie's pal

26 Italy's silhouette

27 Royal of India

28 Perfume dispenser

32 Block of charcoal

33 Stamps

35 Hot tub

36 Moist

38 Obliterate

39 Shrewd

42 Met melody

43 "— la vie"

44 Millinery

45 Felon's flight

46 Lemieux milieu

48 Carnival city

HRS

AVE

BEAM

SNARE

GONNA

OTTLING

MARILYN

MONROE

CRY

LONER

ION

DEWEY

AGED

TWIRL

FISHY

DYAN

MANS

APR

GRAMS

SOS

SOMELIKE

ITTHOT

STROVE

GRAPE

HOVER

HUMS

SET

TEE

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53					54				55			

CRYPTOQUIP

M H B J D W E S Q H W U Q E M F I T D J O

H B J K G G D P D A U M " M F J J D M M

H B S G U J H B P I D O M , " H A U M

W U T K Q H B P H B A U P D Q H B P .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: QUARANTINED IN THE HOSPITAL, THE CANDY FANATIC ACTUALLY REQUESTED A DRIP OF PRALINE SOLUTION.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals N