

Serena goes for broke

AFP, London

Serena Williams insists she has nothing to lose as the four-time champion bids to secure her seventh appearance in the Wimbledon final with a victory over second seed Victoria Azarenka on Thursday.

Williams booked her place in the last four by ending Petra Kvitova's reign as champion with a 6-3, 7-5 victory on Tuesday, while Azarenka moved into her second successive Wimbledon semifinal by defeating unseeded Austrian Tamira Paszek 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

That sets the stage for a fascinating clash between one of Wimbledon's all-time greats and a talented contender in Azarenka who has already enjoyed the best year of her life after winning a series of titles including her first Grand Slam crown at the Australian Open.

Williams, who last won a Grand Slam at Wimbledon in 2010, has been impressed by Azarenka's rise over the last six months, but the American believes the lack of pressure she feels at the moment could be the decisive factor as it allows her to go for broke at crucial moments.

For Azarenka, the 22-year-old's meeting with 13-time Grand Slam champion Williams represents a chance to make amends for last year's Wimbledon semifinal defeat against Kvitova, and also a quarter-final loss to Williams in 2009.

The other semifinal between eighth seed Angelique Kerber and



SERENA WILLIAMS

VICTORIA AZARENKA



AGNIESZKA RADWANSKA

ANGELIQUE KERBER

SEMIFINAL-LINEUP

Angelique Kerber (GER x8) v Agnieszka Radwanska (POL x3) Serena Williams (USA x6) v Victoria Azarenka (BLR x2)

world number three Agnieszka Radwanska will produce a first-time Wimbledon finalist.

Kerber defeated fellow German Sabine Lisicki 6-3, 6-7 (7/9), 7-5 to reach her first Wimbledon semi-final.

Just 12 months ago, the 24-year-old left the All England Club ranked 100th after a first round exit that came during a miserable sequence of opening round defeats.

But a period of reflection after Wimbledon refocused Kerber's mind and she has surged up the rankings to

eight place since a breakthrough run to the US Open semi-finals last year.

It will also be a defining moment for Radwanska, who ignored a series of rain delays to defeat 17th seed Maria Kirilenko 7-5, 4-6, 7-5 in a match that started on Court One at 2.20pm local time, but was eventually played to a conclusion under the Centre Court roof after 9.45pm.

The 23-year-old is the first Polish player to reach a Grand Slam semi-final in the Open era after finally win in the last eight of a major at

Two-weeks off for Nadal

AFP, Paris

Rafael Nadal, knocked out of Wimbledon in the second round last week, is to take two weeks off because of tendinitis in his knee.

The Spaniard will miss a charity match against world number one Novak Djokovic in Madrid's Bernabeu stadium on July 14 but hopes, however, to have fully recovered in time for the July 27-August 12 Olympics in London.

"I want to apologise to all, in particular to the fans that had already purchased a ticket to such a good cause, but unfortunately we won't be able to play for the moment that match in Madrid," he said.

"The doctors have been checking my knee and I suffer a tendinitis which will have me away from any practice or matches for 15 days, which makes it impossible to play with Novak Djokovic as we'd expected and announced.

"I was with my doctors on Monday and started already my treatment with the goal to be ready for the London Olympic Games and represent Spain once again."

Nadal, the world number two, added: "I will now work on my rehab as well as taking some short holidays to resume my practice in 15 days."

BAF Inter-base swimming competition

SPORTS REPORTER

BAF Base Birshreshtha Motiur Rahman emerged champions in the Inter-Base Swimming Competition of Bangladesh Air Force which concluded at the Navy Swimming Complex in Banani yesterday.

Base Birshreshtha Motiur Rahman grabbed nine gold, six silver and two bronze medals followed by BAF-Base Bashar which won six gold, eight silver and one bronze medals.

LSC Szal of Base Bashar was adjudged best swimmer in the competition.

BAF-Base Jahiur Haque lifted the title of water-polo beating BAF Base Birshreshtha Motiur Rahman 10-2 in the final.

Air Vice Marshal Abu Esrar distributed prizes among the winners.

William, Kate light up royal box

AFP, London

Prince William and his wife Catherine took their places in the Royal Box on Wimbledon Centre Court on Wednesday to watch six-time champion Roger Federer play in his quarter-final against Mikhail Youzhny.

The royal couple received a rapturous welcome from the crowd as they arrived in the front row of the box, having already proved a hit around the All England Club.

"My life is complete!," tweeted German women's player Anna-Lena Groenefeld.

"I don't care that we won the Mixed! Prince William said hi to me! I was so excited I won my service game!!!!"

Also in the Royal Box were Australian legend Rod Laver, 50 years after he completed the Grand Slam, as well as golden couple Andre Agassi and wife Steffi Graf, both former Wimbledon champions.

Final before

FROM PAGE 16

Tsonga against Germany's Philipp Kohlschreiber.

Tsonga, who beat Federer at this stage last year, is aiming for his second Wimbledon semifinal, while 27th seed Kohlschreiber will be playing in the last eight of a Grand Slam for the first time.

Sangakkara stranded in drawn Test

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Kumar Sangakkara missed a double-century for the second successive match as the rain-hit second Test between Pakistan and Sri Lanka ended in a dreary draw in Colombo on Wednesday.

Sangakkara, who was stranded on an unbeaten 199 in the first Test at Galle, was dismissed for 192 after helping Sri Lanka avoid the embarrassment of a follow-on on the fifth and final day.

The hosts, who began the day needing 74 more runs to make Pakistan bat again, were all out for 391 in the post-lunch session in reply to Pakistan's 551-6 declared.

Pakistan, leading by 160 runs on the first innings, made 100-2 in their second knock when skipper Misbahul Haq close the innings soon after tea to attempt an unlikely win.

Sri Lanka appeared disinterested in chasing the tough victory target of 261 in 37 overs and were 86-2 in 22 overs when the match was called off at the Sinhalese Sports Club.

Sri Lanka will head for the third and final Test in

Pallekele from Sunday with a 1-0 lead, having won the opening encounter in Galle by 209 runs.

The home side, who began the day at 278-5, were steered out of trouble by a 89-run stand for the sixth wicket between Sangakkara and Angelo Mathews (47).

But Mathews' dismissal soon after lunch triggered a middle-order collapse in which Sri Lanka lost their last five wickets for 21 runs.

Young left-arm seamer Junaid Khan finished with his second five-wicket haul in Tests and spinner Abdur Rehman claimed four as the Pakistanis extracted more from the slow pitch than their Sri Lankan counterparts.

Sangakkara looked set for his ninth double-century when he fell against the run of play after defying Pakistan's attack for almost nine hours.

The left-hander stepped out to loft Rehman and only managed a thick edge to Taufeeq Umar at square-leg.

Sangakkara, who hit 15 fours and a six in his 30th Test century, raised a cry of anguish before walking off to warm applause from less than 500 spectators at the ground.

Sangakkara is already the highest run-getter against

Pakistan, having surpassed Indian great Sunil Gavaskar's tally of 2,089 runs when he reached 60 on Tuesday.

He has nine three-figure knocks against Pakistan with a top score of 230 in Lahore in March, 2002.

Junaid had Mathews caught behind and then bowled Nuwan Kulasekara, while Rehman dismissed Prasanna Jayawardene and last man Nuwan Pradeep to terminate the innings.

In the brief second innings for both teams, Taufeeq Umar scored an unbeaten 42 for Pakistan and Tharanga Paranavithana made 32 for Sri Lanka.

The Test was marred by bad weather, which allowed just 71 of the stipulated 180 overs to be bowled on the second and third days.

SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN: First innings 551-6 declared (Hafeez 196, Umar 65, Azhar 157, Misbah 66 not out; Herath 3-164)

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Includes stats for Kulasekara, Pradeep, Randiv, Herath, and Sri Lanka's batting performance.

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Includes stats for Cheema, Junaid, Ajmal, Rehman, Hafeez, Azhar.

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Includes stats for Kulasekara, Pradeep, Randiv, Herath.

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Includes stats for Sri Lanka's batting performance.

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Includes stats for Sri Lanka's batting performance.

The abode of the corrupt

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

When Pakistan's leg-spinner Danish Kaneria was banned for life for fixing, many were baffled as to why Pakistanis were so talented at cricket yet so susceptible to the lure of corruption.

It was another jolt with the country still reeling from the devastating 2010 spot-fixing scandal at Lords, which ended in lengthy bans and jail terms for then Test captain Salman Butt, and pacemen Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer.

Corruption is rife in Pakistan. Businessmen consider it a necessary evil and last month the prime minister lost his job after being convicted of contempt for refusing to reopen corruption cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

In a country with an ineffective government, disastrous power cuts, Taliban violence, Al-Qaeda strongholds and an economy at risk of defaulting, cricket is the most popular if not the only form of entertainment.

"Corruption cases against our politicians are common, but the corruption of 19-year-old Aamer was hard to swallow," said Tauseef Khan, head of mass communication at the Federal Urdu University in Karachi.

"It reflects the lack of role models and unabated corruption in our society."

For those talented enough, cricket offers an escape from the hardship of low-income and poverty-stricken homes such as those where Aamer grew up just outside the capital Islamabad.

The commercialisation of the game in the late 1970s enabled cricketers to earn tens of thousands of dollars a year, but also gave rise

to corruption.

"The majority of cricketers in Pakistan come from poor families and when they see so much money floating around, sadly temptation gets the better of them," said former captain Mushtaq Mohammad.

Many also blame the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for being unable to stop the rot after life bans on Salim Malik and Ata-ur Rehman, and fines for Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Inzamam-ul Haq, Saeed Anwar and Mushtaq Ahmed in 2000.

Commentator and former captain Ramiz Raja, who played with all these stars, blamed the lack of structure.

"I don't think the system moulds players into an ambassadorial role for the game," Raja told AFP.

"It's a mix of so many factors: lack of education which could help to weigh good and bad options, social breakdown as we increasingly see villains ruling the roost, lack of sound upbringing and lack of role models, especially in cricket."

Cricketers are lionised to such an extent that fans refuse to believe their idols are ever capable of crime and corruption, further emboldening offenders.

So there was little surprise when Butt was warmly welcomed home last month -- in contrast to the apathy felt over former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's conviction for contempt last April.

"The power of denial is a safety rope that breaks a fall. There have been examples in which cricket crime has gone unpunished because of such an approach," said Raja.

"Hard core evidence is difficult to get and the crooked know how to drown out the sane voices by playing on the emotions of the nation's simplicity and giving it a conspiracy spin," he added.

Oscar makes Ramprakash tells

FROM PAGE 16

knee before turning one-year-old because of a congenital condition that meant he was born without lower leg bones.

Having failed to qualify for the 400m at the 2008 Beijing Olympics he went on to compete at the 2011 world championships in South Korea, where he made the 400m semi-final and won a silver in the 4x400m relay.

However, his omission from the relay team for the final left him venting his anger at South African officials.

Pistorius, a three-event defending champion, will also compete at the Paralympic Games in London in the 100m, 200m, 400m and 4x100m relay.

FROM PAGE 16 fixtures, was dropped by Surrey for the first time earlier this season as he struggled for runs.

Ramprakash, as was the case with his some-time England team-mate Graeme Hick, endured a frustrating international career, averaging a modest 27.32 in Tests -- barely half his county return.

He managed just two Test hundreds, with a best of 154 against the West Indies in Bridgetown in 1998 and 133 against Australia at The Oval in 2001.

Ramprakash also played in 18 one-day internationals. At county level, he topped 1,000 runs in 20 separate seasons and three times made more than 2,000 -- in 1995, 2006 and 2007.

His highest-first class score is an unbeaten 301, for Surrey against Northamptonshire, at The Oval in 2006.

Ramprakash became known beyond cricket circles after winning BBC television's 'Strictly Come Dancing' celebrity dance competition in 2006.

A Surrey statement issued Wednesday said: "Surrey County Cricket Club will be hosting a press conference with Mark Ramprakash on Thursday 5th July at the Kia Oval, where Mark would like to make a statement about his future."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 27 mins and a solution key at the bottom.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a key at the bottom: X SEXISDO SCKDSMDN ICRD I UZKMDSSX UXDVDI IC EDPP, SMDJ ZVSYZPPJ KZWRD RD Z ISNZTOXTK CWZSXCT.

CRYPTOQUIP X SEXISDO SCKDSMDN ICRD I UZKMDSSX UXDVDI IC EDPP, SMDJ ZVSYZPPJ KZWRD RD Z ISNZTOXTK CWZSXCT. Yesterday's Cryptoquip: OLD BOOK ABOUT ACTOR SELLERS' AWFUL REVIEWS FROM MANY PICKY MOVIE CRITICS: "PETER PANNED." Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals E