

### 'Happy to mentor Blake'

ANI, Melbourne

Australian pacer Brett Lee has said he will be more than happy to mentor Jamaican sprint star Yohan Blake in the art of fast bowling if he joins him at the Sydney Sixers for the Big Bash Twenty20 competition.

Blake is hopeful of getting a start in the Australia's Big Bash League with the Sydney Sixers, and would love to face Lee in the nets.

Blake is the target of an audacious approach after revealing he would like to play cricket, while it can also be revealed that Lee attempted to lure Usain Bolt before Shane Warne made an approach to the world's fastest man. The Daily Telegraph reports.

"I'm happy to mentor Yohan in fast bowling, as long as he teaches me how to run 100 metres in 10 seconds," said Lee, the son of a sprinter.

"He is one of the greatest sportsmen in the world and he'd bring colour and international exposure to the Big Bash League, it'd be fantastic," he said.

Lee had originally attempted to lure Bolt to Sydney when on August 11 he sent him the following tweet: "@usainbolt Mate I have a spot for you at the @SixersBBL. Bolt and Lee to open the attack! Well done mate on all your success #coolrunnings."



Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic pumps her fists in celebration of winning the first set during her victory over Shuai Peng of China in the Cincinnati Masters at the Lindner Family Tennis Center in Ohio on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

### Laxman may quit after NZ series

INTERNET, Mumbai

Reports have emerged that Indian batsman VVS Laxman is contemplating retiring from international cricket at the end of the two-match Test series against New Zealand.

English daily 'The Hindu' has quoted Laxman saying that "A final decision will be taken about the exact details of my plans by this [Friday] evening."

Laxman's place in the Test side has been under constant speculation since India's eight consecutive away Test losses last year. He was however named in the 15-member squad for India's two Tests against visitors New Zealand starting August 23rd. It was believed that post Rahul Dravid's retirement, the side still needed a senior member like Laxman.

Laxman's performances in both England and Australia were far from the standards he had set for himself in the past. The Hyderabad had a torrid run Down Under, totaling just 155 runs across eight innings at an average of less than 20. His fitness and running between the wickets have also often come under scrutiny.

37-year old Laxman, who made his Test debut against South Africa at Ahmedabad in November 1996, has played 134 Tests for India, scoring 8781 runs at an average of 45.97, including 17 centuries and 56 fifties.

### Rankings don't worry Rafa

AFP, Madrid

Spanish tennis ace Rafael Nadal, who pulled out of the US Open due to injury, said Friday his sole focus now was on getting back to full fitness again and not worrying about his world ranking.

The world number three on Wednesday withdrew from the US Open, the final Grand Slam of the season, which starts in New York on August 27, because of his continuing battle with knee tendinitis.

"Now I'm not bothered if I'm third or fourth in the ATP. The most important thing is to be physically fit," said Nadal. "I've missed too many important tournaments to continue taking risks. I'll return when my knee is better."

"I'm saddened not to be able to compete in the US Open because it's a tournament in which I've always felt great support but I can't take risks."

Nadal won a record seventh French Open title in June but he crashed out in the second round at Wimbledon in a shock upset against Czech Lukas Rosol.

Shortly after the 26-year-old pulled out of the Olympics and subsequently withdrew from ATP Tour events in Toronto and Cincinnati.

### MCC wants

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Clearly, a day/night Test has to take place in a drier and warmer part of the year.

The MCC went on to say: "The committee believes that, if white clothing is considered a necessity for Test Matches, the pink ball, now much improved is the best option. The committee also believes that a Test Championship will provide a better context for interest in Test cricket."

### City or United?

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with mediocre and aging players. Newcastle might cause a few upsets but they are miles away from being a real threat.

West Ham United, Reading and Southampton won promotion into the English Premier League this season but are likely to be involved in the relegation battle.

Queens Park Rangers and Aston Villa look set to be dragged into the relegation dogfight as both of these two squads struggled last season and were almost eliminated.

## Whatmore confident of Pak success



AFP, Lahore

Pakistan coach Dav Whatmore was upbeat Friday about his side's chances at the World Twenty20, welcoming the opportunity for his players to prepare in the Sri Lankan league.

Nearly all Pakistan's players selected for the September 18 to October 7 tournament in Sri Lanka feature in this month's Sri Lankan Premier League (SLPL).

Whatmore, 58, who was appointed in March and coached Sri Lanka to their 1996 World Cup title, said his players will get good practice in the venues where the World Twenty20 will be held.

"There is an opportunity for some of the boys to participate in the SLPL and it's a good thing and I have no problem with it," Whatmore told reporters at the National Cricket Academy.

"At least they are playing in similar conditions and in those two grounds where we are going to play our matches," said Whatmore of the event where Pakistan is placed in Group D with Bangladesh and New Zealand. "There are a few other (countries) doing

the same thing and they are getting good practice."

Pakistan takes on Australia this month and next in a limited overs series in the United Arab Emirates, comprising three one-day matches and three Twenty20s.

"We will do our best to perform in the conditions, which are close to the conditions in Pakistan, but certainly it won't be in Pakistan."

"The selectors have given us a group of players who are competitive enough to give us the right results and win the games."

The first one-day match will be played in Sharjah on August 28. The next two matches will be in Abu Dhabi on August 31 and Sharjah on September 3.

The three Twenty20 matches will be played in Dubai on September 5, 7 and 10. Whatmore said Pakistan can do well in the World Twenty20.

"Every team has started taking this form of the game more seriously... we have a good team for this format," said Whatmore.

Pakistan were runners-up in the inaugural World Twenty20 in 2007, won the 2009 event held in England and finished semi-finalists in 2010 in the West Indies.

The coach said all teams have good squads but warned "it's a volatile form of game".

## Mooney out of World T20



AFP, Dublin

All-rounder John Mooney has been ruled out of Ireland's squad for next month's World Twenty20 due to a fractured finger which could sideline him for twelve weeks.

"It's disappointing for both John (Mooney) and the team," coach Phil Simmons said as he announced his 15-man squad on Friday.

"He's suffered two finger injuries and this latest one won't heal in time for the start of the tournament.

"He's been a major part of the team for the last three or four years and it's disappointing we have to go without him."

"This will give others an opportunity to push for his place and stake a claim. We have guys who can come in and fill the spot and if selected can hopefully fill the role of John Mooney."

Fast bowler Boyd Rankin has been

selected despite revealing he would retire from Irish duty after the tournament to focus on his England ambitions.

Rankin, who has recently returned from a foot injury with county side Warwickshire, turned down new deals from Ireland in a bid to fulfil his desire to play Test cricket.

Will Porterfield will captain the squad that includes Tim Murtagh, Max Sorensen and Stuart Thompson - all of whom have been named to play in a major competition for the first time.

Ireland will open their Group B campaign against West Indies in Colombo on September 19 before meeting Australia -- who reached the final two years ago -- in their second and final group game five days later.

### SQUAD

William Porterfield (captain), Alex Cusack, George Dockrell, Trent Johnston, Nigel Jones, Ed Joyce, Tim Murtagh, Kevin O'Brien, Niall O'Brien, Boyd Rankin, Paul Stirling, Max Sorensen, Stuart Thompson, Andrew White, Gary Wilson.

## Nadal to be fit for Davis Cup semis



AFP, Madrid

Rafael Nadal, who pulled out of the US Open due to injury, should be ready for the Davis Cup semi-final between Spain and the United States next month, the tennis ace's coach and uncle said Thursday.

The Spaniard withdrew on Wednesday from the US Open, the final Grand Slam of the season, which starts in New York on August 27, because of his continuing battle with knee tendinitis.

"It was the right decision. This pause will further prolong his career and, possibly, he will have no more problems in the future," Toni Nadal told Spanish radio, adding the goal is to work for a "full recovery".

Nadal, the world number three, won a record seventh French Open title in June but he crashed out in the second round at Wimbledon in a shock upset against Czech Lukas Rosol.

Shortly after the 26-year-old pulled out of the London Olympics because of the long-standing problem with his knees and subsequently withdrew from ATP Tour events in Toronto and Cincinnati.

But Toni Nadal said he was confident that his nephew would be ready to take part in the September 14-16 Davis Cup semi-final between Spain and the United States in the

northern Spanish city of Gijon.

"There is a month to go and we hope that he will be fine, if not technically, at least physically," he said.

"After Wimbledon we decided to rest a few days and then work on strengthening his quadriceps but it was difficult."

"We eventually managed to boost a bit of his strength but at the end of the training sessions he continued to feel discomfort and his recovery was not enough to face such a hard competition as the US Open."

"Now we are training normally, but it is not the same as competing four hours a day during a tournament," the coach added.

Meanwhile, Carlos Moya, a former world number one and 1998 French Open winner, believes compatriot Nadal will come back a stronger, better player.

"Rafa is going to come back for sure and he's going to be stronger than he was before," Moya told [www.atpchampionstour.com](http://www.atpchampionstour.com).

"Of course I am worried -- he's been out since the second round of Wimbledon, but now he's resting and having physio. Maybe if he had come back now he would have hurt the knee even more. Now he is very calm, he takes his time."

"Mentally he is such a great player and for sure he's going to give everything. He will be 100 percent again and we will see him lifting another Grand Slam trophy. I feel sure of that."

## Murray fails, Federer sails



AFP, Cincinnati

Olympic champion Andy Murray was sent crashing out of the Cincinnati Masters on Thursday, falling 6-4, 6-4 to French lucky loser Jeremy Chardy.

Britain's Murray won a match in Toronto last week before quitting with a knee injury but had looked impressive in his opener here against American Sam Querrey.

But the 25-year-old Murray was distinctly under-cooked against Chardy and his 16th unforced error of the second set sent the Frenchman into the last eight.

"This was like my second or third match in the hard court. I played well yesterday; didn't play so well today," said Murray.

"Sometimes I've won tournaments in the buildup (to a major) and it hasn't helped me. That doesn't normally have that much bearing. But I would have liked to have done a bit better this week," he said, with the US Open on the horizon.

Four-time champion and top seed Roger Federer turned in another flawless performance, schooling Australian teenager Bernard Tomic 6-2, 6-4 with 27 winners.

"Overall I'm happy. But it's hard to judge my game in these quick conditions," said Federer, the Olympic silver medallist, who however admitted that his serve was "a bit off."

"It was a good performance, I'm playing as well as I want to right now," said the Swiss great.

Second seed Novak Djokovic barely broke a sweat against Nikolay Davydenko, who was nursing a shoulder injury and only lasted 30 minutes before quitting after Djokovic took the first set, 6-0.

Davydenko had 10 unforced errors and eight double-faults.

"This is not the way to win a match, it was clear that he was struggling physically," Djokovic said. "I just hope he will be fit for the US Open."

Canadian Milos Raonic upset fifth seed Tomas Berdych with 20 aces in a 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 win.

Olympic bronze medallist Juan

Martin del Potro, who missed 2010 due to right wrist surgery, had troubles with his left wrist, but pushed through the pain to notch a 7-6 (7/2), 2-6, 6-1 win over Serbia's Viktor Troicki.

Tenth seed Marley Fish continued to perform well on his home cement courts, beating Czech Radek Stepanek 6-3, 6-3 with seven aces and 23 winners. Fish will next play Federer.

Recent exertions in winning Wimbledon and Olympic gold caught up with Serena Williams, but the fatigued second seed nevertheless stumbled through into the WTA quarters. The 30-year-old defeated Urszula Radwanska 6-4, 6-3.

"I was tired out there," said Williams. "I just told myself to try to move my feet a bit, get through this match and go get some rest."

Top seed Agnieszka Radwanska beat American Sloane Stephens 6-1, 4-6, 6-4, while US Open titleholder Samantha Stosur beat Elena Makarova 6-1, 6-3.

Former Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitova, the fourth seed, advanced over China's Peng Shuai, 6-2, 6-2.

## Dravid wants IPL window



CRICINFO, London

Rahul Dravid, the former India batsman, has said that creating a window for the Indian Premier League would not only let the world's best players participate in the lucrative domestic Twenty20 tournament but, importantly, also allow them to play Test cricket, thereby enlivening the longer format.

"The reality is the IPL is an important tournament and people do want to play it," Dravid said on BBC's Test Match Special at Lord's during the third Test between England and South Africa. "And we are probably coming to a stage where maybe a time will come [when] there will need to be give-and-take -- whether it is finding a window, or, whether making the tournament a little shorter."

Dravid was asked by the TMS host Jonathan Agnew whether the IPL, a tournament that lasts for close to two months, had played a big role in Kevin Pietersen falling out with the ECB and losing support from his teammates, which led to him missing the Lord's Test. Dravid, who is in London to attend the MCC cricket committee meetings, was not sure if the IPL was the reason for the Pietersen debacle. He said a solution was necessary considering the IPL would continue to clash with the start of the England cricketing summer and Test cricket could not afford losing big names such as Pietersen and Chris Gayle.

Pietersen had stirred a controversy in April when he said England were jealous of the IPL. A month later, he retired from limited-overs cricket, saying he wanted to focus only on Tests. That decision came on the heels of exhaustive discussions with the ECB, where Pietersen said he wanted to play only Test and Twenty20 cricket. But the ECB central contracts state that any player who makes himself

unavailable for either format of limited-overs cricket is automatically ruled out of selection for both ODIs and T20s.

"There are some positives with the IPL and you have to understand that if the top players in the world want to play it and people want to watch then there has got to be something good about it as well," Dravid said. "It does affect the England season particularly, and, especially since traditionally the English season has been the same for many, many years. So it is challenging that a little bit."

"In time we are getting to that stage where all of us want the best players playing [Test cricket]. We all want Chris Gayle playing for West Indies whenever West Indies play a Test match. None of us want to see a situation today where a great player like Kevin misses out today for whatever reasons and I don't want to get into that. But it is disappointing. The game is a loser when the top players don't play Test cricket."

Dravid, who led Rajasthan Royals in the previous IPL, felt that for Test cricket to continue attracting fans and remain marketable, it was important that the best players were always available for selection. Leaving out the likes of Gayle and Pietersen, Dravid felt, would only drive the fans away.

"I am not sure what the solution to it is exactly but I would love to be in a situation where the best players can play the IPL as well as represent their country in Test cricket. People like Chris Gayle and Kevin Pietersen are fantastic for Test cricket as they are for IPL and T20 cricket. And they have a short window in which to show us their talent. At the end of the day this is the game for the fans. The best players should represent their country -- it is not only about the people who come to the ground. It is also for the young boys and girls who passionately follow their country in Test cricket. It is hard and disappointing when the best players don't turn up to play for their country."



PHOTO: RUETERS

Spain's world No 3 tennis star Rafael Nadal talks during television interviews, in which he gave reasons for pulling out of the US Open, in Palma de Mallorca yesterday.