

Li wins first since French Open

AFP, Cincinnati

China's Li Na earned her first title since winning the French Open 15 months ago, beating Germany's Angelique Kerber 1-6, 6-3, 6-1 to claim the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters on Sunday.

The 30-year-old Li rallied from a crushing first-set loss with some superb serving as she won 80 percent of her first-serve points in a dominating third set.

This was her first tournament under new coach Carlos Rodriguez, who only came on board mid-week.

Li ended her fight-back victory with six breaks of Kerber's serve from 21 chances, with the fatigued Kerber starting to feel the effects of a leg injury.

Federer top seed for US Open

AFP, New York

Five-time champion and world number one Roger Federer was confirmed Tuesday as the top men's seed at the US Open, the last Grand Slam tennis tournament of the year that starts Monday at Flushing Meadows.

Defending champion Novak Djokovic is seeded second and world number four Andy Murray of Britain, who won Olympic gold at Wimbledon, is seeded third -- higher than his world ranking because of the injury absence of Spain's Rafael Nadal.

Spain's David Ferrer is seeded fourth.

The singles draw for the tournament, which runs from August 27-September 9, will be made on Thursday.

Federer, who won his 17th Grand Slam singles title at Wimbledon, has won six titles in 2012, including his seventh Wimbledon title and three ATP Masters Series titles.

The Swiss great won five straight US Open titles from 2004-08.

Laxman

FROM PAGE 16

It was all very emotional."

Laxman was retained for the Kiwi matches despite failing miserably in the last two Test series in England and Australia, both of which India lost 4-0 and were dethroned as the number one side.

He managed just 182 runs in four Tests in England at an average of 22.75 and fared even worse in Australia with 155 runs in four matches at 19.37.

"No one likes to lose, so of course it was very disappointing to lose those two series very badly," said Laxman. "But it happens in sport. Hopefully, the team will avenge those defeats this season."

Both England and Australia are due to play four Tests each in India on either side of the new year.

Laxman is best known for his majestic 281 against Australia at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata in March 2001, when India turned the tables on the world champions after being made to follow-on 274 runs behind.

When India struggled at 232-4 in the second innings and faced certain defeat, Laxman and Rahul Dravid (180) put on a match-winning partnership of 376 to help their team post 657-7 declared.

Steve Waugh's Australians, set a target of 384 runs, folded up for 212 in their second knock, following a six-wicket haul by Harbhajan Singh, to leave India improbable victors by 171 runs.

Laxman's 10-hour masterclass which contained 44 boundaries is often regarded as the best match-winning innings played by an Indian batsman.

Laxman is the fourth senior Indian cricketer to retire in the last four years, leaving batting master Sachin Tendulkar the last of the veterans to hold fort in a period of transition.



Li Na of China poses with the winner's trophy after defeating Angelique Kerber of Germany in the final of the Cincinnati Masters in Mason, Ohio on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

India-SA to open Champs Trophy



AFP, London

World champions India will open the 2013 Champions Trophy in England and Wales with a clash against South Africa in Cardiff on June 6 next year.

Meanwhile hosts England will begin the tournament by playing defending champions and old rivals Australia at Birmingham's Edgbaston ground.

The Champions Trophy, the "mini World Cup", features the world's eight leading nations in 50-over cricket.

Next year Group A will include Australia, England, New Zealand and Sri Lanka while India, Pakistan, South Africa and the West Indies will compete in Group B.

As well as Cardiff and Edgbaston, The Oval in south London will also stage Champions Trophy fixtures, with the final at Edgbaston on June 23.

One of the standout group fixtures will be the clash between sub-continental rivals India and Pakistan in Birmingham, which has one of Britain's largest South Asian populations, on June 15.

"This will be a terrific opportunity for fans to see the world's very best one-day sides in

action over the space of less than three weeks and the fixture schedule has thrown up a host of exciting head-to-head contests," said tournament director and former South Africa seamer Steve Elworthy, after the England and Wales Cricket Board released the fixtures on Tuesday.

Next year's edition will be the seventh and last Champions Trophy, with the tournament being replaced by the International Cricket Council's new World Test Championship instead.

Officials had hoped to launch the World Test Championship in 2013 but sponsor and broadcast agreements meant they had to continue with the Champions Trophy.

First played in 1998, the Champions Trophy has usually taken place every two years, filling the "gap" between World Cups, staged every four years.

But the 2008 edition due to be played in Pakistan was delayed because of security concerns until 2009 when it was switched to South Africa, where Australia beat New Zealand in the final.

The tournament hasn't been played since, with 2010 seeing the ICC World Twenty20 in the Caribbean while last year India, on home soil, won the 50-over World Cup by beating Sri Lanka in a final in Mumbai.

India

FROM PAGE 17

way and that's going up," said Dhoni.

"For us, it will be to start the Test on a positive note. We have not played a Test in the last six-seven months, so it's important to get into the groove."

New Zealand captain Ross Taylor said India would be tough to beat at home -- with or without Dravid and Laxman.

"I won't say it is going to be easy, but the confidence in the team goes up with India not having Rahul or Laxman, who are quality players," he said.

"But that gives an opportunity to youngsters. Whoever India decide to go with, we will be attacking them and try and put them under as much pressure as possible."

Taylor said he was looking forward to an improved performance from his side after having recently lost a Test series in the West Indies.

"We would like to be as positive as possible. We did not play as well as we know we should have in the West Indies. Playing India in India is always tough," said the New Zealand skipper.

"We know we have to play and perform a lot better than we did in the West Indies."

New Zealand are without key spinner Daniel Vettori due to an injury, but Taylor said his absence would give an opportunity to slow bowlers Tarun Nethula and Jeetan Patel to impress.

WOMEN'S CRICKET BD lose to Pakistan, Ireland

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Women's Cricket team lost both of their matches against Pakistan and Ireland in the tri-nation ODI series in Dublin.

On Monday, Bangladesh suffered a 42-run defeat against Pakistan at the Railway Union Cricket Club in Dublin.

Pakistan posted 180 for six in 50 overs after being sent in to bat. Bismah Maroof top-scored with 67.

Jahanara Alam, Lata Mondol and Sukhara Rahman took one wicket each.

In reply, Bangladesh were all out for 138 in 46.3 overs. Rumana Ahmed made the team highest 42. Sana Mir captured four wickets.

On Tuesday, in a match curtailed by rain Bangladesh lost against hosts Ireland by 62 runs through the D/L method at the Phoenix Cricket Club Ground in Phoenix Park in Dublin.

Ireland scored 148 for six in 45 overs and Bangladesh were bundled out for 94 runs in 35.4 overs.

Bangladesh take on Pakistan again today and play against Ireland tomorrow.

Roger crushes Novak to win Cincy

AFP, Cincinnati

Roger Federer won his sixth title of the season as he beat Novak Djokovic 6-0, 7-6 (9/7) in a battle between the top two players in the world on Sunday at the Cincinnati Masters.

The Swiss top seed got through a perfect week without losing serve to capture his 76th career trophy.

It was also his 16th win in 29 meetings against world number two Djokovic and it means he will go into the US Open as clear favourite having become the first man to win five titles at the Cincinnati event.

Federer's success on Sunday marked his 21st Masters 1000 trophy, pulling him level with Rafael Nadal on the all-time list.

At the age of 31, Wimbledon champion Federer also became the oldest Cincinnati winner since Andre Agassi who

U-19s fail

FROM PAGE 16

In reply, England recovered from an early jolt to reach the target of 218 runs for the loss of six wickets in 48.2 overs. Ben Foakes made 47 and Sam Wood added 46.

Taskin took two wickets.

'IPL changed KP attitude'



AFP, London

England coach Andy Flower insists Kevin Pietersen's infatuation with the Indian Premier League played a significant role in the collapse of his international career.

Pietersen's England future looks bleak after his relationship with Flower and English captain Andrew Strauss was shattered by the flamboyant batsman's controversial actions over the last few months.

The 32-year-old has been cast into exile after sending text messages to South African players that allegedly contained criticism of Flower and Strauss during England's recent Test series against the Proteas.

But Flower believes Pietersen, dropped for the third Test and left out of England's Twenty20 World Cup squad, stopped focusing on international action after his lucrative spell playing domestic cricket in India.

Pietersen announced his shock retirement from limited overs internationals earlier this year in a move that would allow him more scope to play with his high-profile IPL franchise the Delhi Daredevils.

He subsequently backtracked on playing a full IPL tournament next year in a YouTube video, where he re-affirmed his commitment to representing England in all three formats.

But Flower is certain Pietersen's availability for the cash-rich tournament is at the

heart of the current problems and, with little hope of an IPL window being introduced to avoid clashes with England matches, that could herald the end of the batsman's international career.

"I think it's fair to say that his issues over being available for the entire IPL have changed his attitude," Flower said.

"I think that was the catalyst for a lot of the stuff. The IPL and the international fixtures in England are an area of conflict. And it will continue to be an area of conflict in the future."

"It would be better if there was a very clear window prior to our international season starting. But it doesn't look like that is an issue that is going to be sorted out in the future, so it may well recur."

England's central contracts for their key players will be decided next month but Flower does not expect any resolution on the Pietersen matter to have been concluded before then.

That would likely cast further doubt over the South Africa-born batsman's future, although Flower was reluctant to be drawn on the consequences it might have on Pietersen's contract negotiations.

"I don't think it would be fair for me to say that. Regardless of central contracts, I wouldn't like to put a time frame on it because that might be unrealistic," he said.

"To resolve certain issues of trust and mutual respect, it might take longer than that."

Aus rankings 'unacceptable'



AFP, Sydney

Australian captain Michael Clarke has told his team their world rankings are "unacceptable" as he worked to fire them up ahead of upcoming matches against Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Clarke and the Australian team face emerging cricketing nation Afghanistan in a single one-dayer in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday before three matches against Pakistan and a Twenty20 series.

Speaking ahead of his departure, Clarke said the players need to improve significantly on their 4-0 humbling by England in their last one-day series.

"I think it's a good opportunity for us to get some of that consistency back in the one-day format," he said on the Cricket Australia website.

"We didn't play anywhere near as well as we would've liked in England."

"We learned a lot and it was nice for some of the guys who hadn't experienced those conditions to get over and do that, but we certainly didn't get the results we were after."

"So I think it's a good opportunity to turn that around."

Australia are taking an experienced squad to the UAE, which will be followed by the World Twenty20 tournament in Sri Lanka, and they have plenty to prove, having slipped down the rankings in all forms of the game.

Earlier this month they lost the top spot on the International Cricket Council's one-day rankings for the first time in nearly three years.

Going into the UAE series, Australia sit behind England, South Africa and India while things are even worse on the T20 ladder, with Australia ninth, below New Zealand and minnows Bangladesh.

They are third in the Test stakes, adrift of South Africa and England.

"It's not about what you say now, it's about what we do as a team," Clarke said.

"It's now up to us, as individual players and as a team, to do something about it."

No more Bolt vs Blake this season

AFP, Lausanne

Six-time Olympic champion Usain Bolt of Jamaica and his young compatriot Yohan Blake will not race each other again this season, Blake's manager, Cubee Seegobin, indicated on Wednesday.

Bolt, who defended his 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay titles in London, is due to contest the 200m in Thursday's Diamond League meeting in Lausanne, while Blake, who won silver in both individual sprints, will run in the 100m.

The training partners -- gold medalists in Jamaica's world record-breaking 4x100m relay squad -- will race over those same distances in the next meeting in Zurich on August 30, before swapping for the Brussels event on September 7.

Asked about the possibilities for a rematch between the pair and his desire to test himself against his elder rival, Blake said: "Yes, I always love running against him. But ask my manager, who really knows the business."

Seegobin said: "Coach (Glenn) Mills gives Yohan a programme and it's tailored according to people's wishes. It's something for the managers, the meeting director and sponsors."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

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by — (adjoining)

5 Woman

8 Two-timers

12 Geometry find

13 Singer Sumac

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18 One of Henry VIII's

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20 Strike from the text

21 The Red and the Black

23 — the season to be jolly

24 Post-tragedy joking, e.g.

28 Layer

31 Bullring bravo

32 Rock

34 Beer's cousin

35 Snapshots

37 Inept ones

39 Knock

41 Frog's kin

42 Church key, e.g.

45 Steering gadget

49 Dressy clothing

51 Tittle

52 Misplace

53 Compete

54 Applaud

55 Basin access-

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19 Favorable votes

22 Brown ermine

24 Jazzy style

25 Muham-

mad or Laila

26 Lessen

27 Backed

29 Wapiti

30 In medias —

33 Jacob's brother

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38 User

40 Apiece

42 Look lecherously

43 Turn the soil

44 Carry on

46 Ration (out)

47 Greek vowels

48 En-grossed

50 Martini ingredient

Solution time: 24 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Saturday's Cryptoquip: SUGARY TREAT
MANUFACTURED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE LIVING
BETWEEN MOUNTAINSIDES: LOLLY OF THE
VALLEY.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals T