

Southee out of SA Tests

CRICINFO, Johannesburg

Tim Southee, the New Zealand fast bowler, has been ruled out of the Test series in South Africa because of a thumb injury. He needs surgery for a ruptured ligament and is likely to be sidelined for six-eight weeks.

Southee sustained the injury while diving in the field during a Plunket Shield match between Northern Districts and Wellington at Karori Park. He scored 156 off 130 balls and took seven wickets in Northern Districts' six-wicket win.

"He landed heavily on his thumb while fielding, with scans indicating the ligament has fully ruptured and retracted," New Zealand physio Paul Close said. "After consultation with NZC medical staff and a hand specialist it was decided the best course of action is for him to have surgery.

"He will commence rehabilitation immediately following the procedure, with a view to him returning to cricket during the home summer. The procedure is likely to keep him out of the game for 6-8 weeks."

Southee, who is due to become a father soon, was already missing the Twenty20s in South Africa. New Zealand had not decided on a replacement for Southee, who was their best bowler in the drawn Test series in Sri Lanka, where he took 12 wickets in two matches. Eight of those came in the second Test in Colombo, which New Zealand won by 167 runs.

V-Day tennis

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The Sharmin Alam Sardar, Kibria Ayeda Jaman pair, Priti-Laxman pair, Moumita Jannat-Jhilik Chakma pair and Ishita Afroz-Ayesha Sultana pair defeated their respective rivals to confirm the semi-final berths in the women's doubles.



India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh (R) celebrates one of his three wickets with a teammate during the first T20I against England at Pune yesterday.

PHOTO: CRICINFO

India draw first blood

Cricket

CRICINFO, Pune

Yuvraj Singh's decade-long attempt to secure a permanent spot in the Test team may have been thwarted once again this month, but he showed why he is indispensable in limited-overs formats with a virtuoso all-round performance.

In a game-changing spell of left-arm spin, Yuvraj took three wickets to restrict England to 157-6. The southpaw then struck 38 off 21 balls as the home side won the first T20 International by five wickets.

He struck two fours and three sixes and dominated a match-winning third-wicket stand with Virat Kohli (21). Yuvraj also won the player-of-the-match award for his fine all-round show.

Earlier, in the first international match at the Subrata Roy Stadium, England had muscled 68 in seven overs as Alex Hales and Luke Wright rattled along at more than 10 an over for the second wicket. Hales began with two powerful pulls for four in the first over, and then showed off his straight-hitting to sprint to a 26-ball half-century, his fourth for England. Unlike Hales, Wright hadn't spent time in India with the England Performance Programme squad but he too played a fluent boundary-filled innings, not flustered by the change in conditions from the Big Bash League in Australia.

Yuvraj's introduction in the ninth over

transformed the game. He was the seventh bowler MS Dhoni turned to as India desperately searched for ways to stall the runs, and he immediately delivered. Five of the previous six overs had been punished for 10 runs or more, but Yuvraj in his first gave away just five singles. In his next, he had Luke Wright caught at long-off. In his third, Hales was dropped by Dhoni, then bowled before England captain Eoin Morgan gave long-on a catch. The triple-blow sucked out the momentum from the innings, and by the end of his spell the run-rate was down to around seven-and-a-half.

Ashok Dinda, leading India's pace attack though he himself is fairly new to international cricket, delivered the perfect penultimate over, taking two wickets and giving away only two runs. Either side of that though, Dhoni's go-to bowler in Twenty20s, R Ashwin, and debutant fast bowler Parvinder Awana were hit for two sixes in an over each as Jos Buttler's unbeaten 33 lifted England to 157. That was a score India seemed happy to concede on a good track in a stadium with short boundaries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: 157 for 6 in 20 overs (Hales 56, Wright 34; Patel 24, Buttler 33 not out; Dinda 2-18, Yuvraj 3-19)

INDIA: 158 for 5 in 17.5 overs (Gambhir 16, Rahane 19, Kohli 21, Yuvraj 38, Raina 2-6, Dhoni 24 not out; Bresnan 2-26)

Result: India won by 5 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Yuvraj Singh.

Early starts for Indo-Pak matches

PTI, New Delhi

The one-day international matches of the much-anticipated cricket series between India and Pakistan beginning next week will have early starts, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced on Thursday.

The BCCI has decided to start the second and third ODI in Kolkata (January 3) and Delhi (January 6) from 12 noon.

Though no official reason was given for this but dew could be a possible factor.

Abahani's

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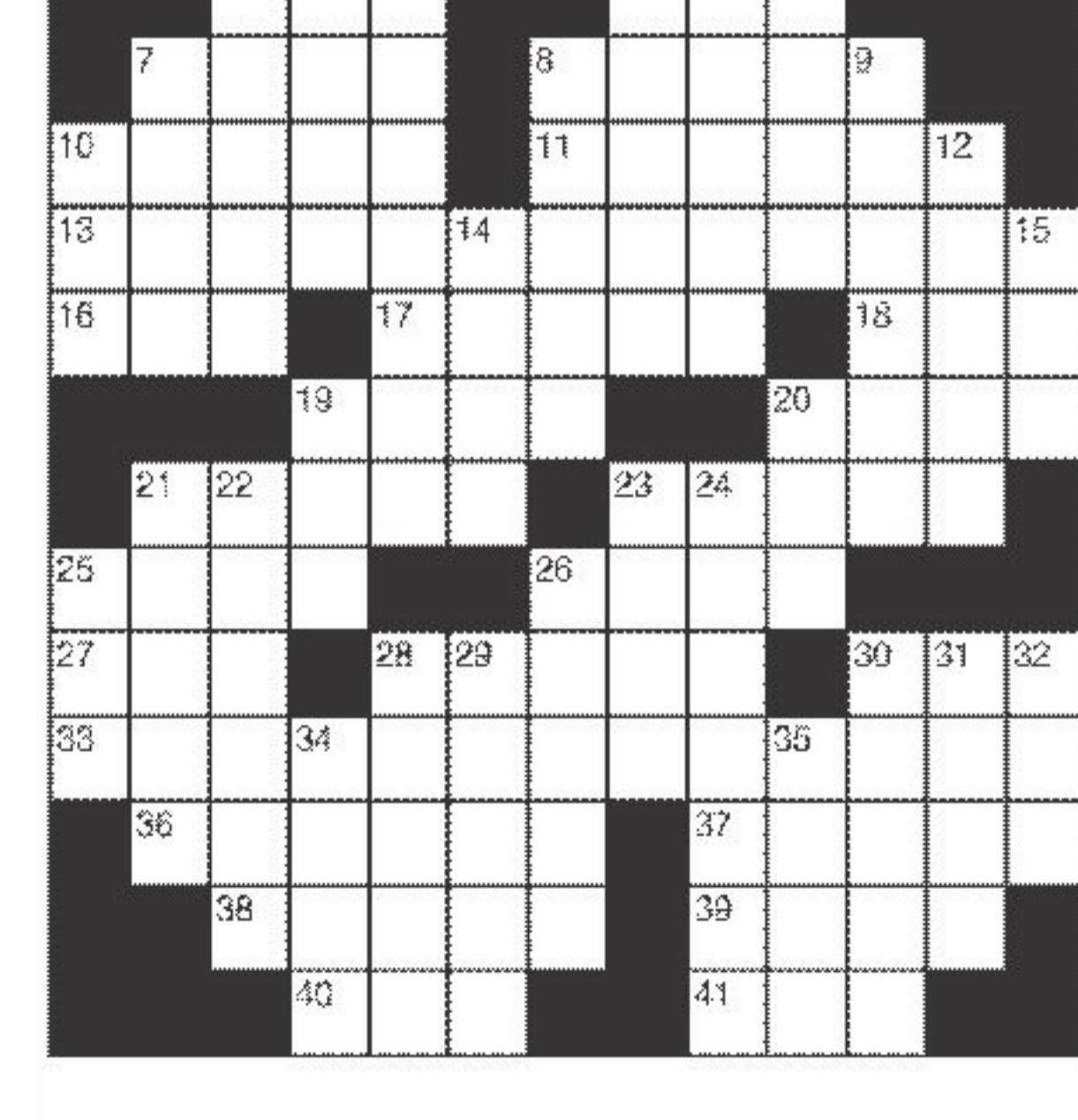
On the other hand, Federation Cup champions Sheikh Russel have already dropped three points from three matches and are a shadow of their Federation Cup performance, leading to a period of soul-searching despite the presence of nine national players as well as some quality foreigners.

"There is no alternative but to win the match against Abahani if we want to stay in the race," said Sheikh Russel coach Maruful Haque. "We want to close the gap with Abahani. We have not been consistent on the pitch but I am expecting a steady performance tomorrow (Friday)."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT WILL A PERSON

DO TO GET SOME MEDIUM-SIZE LIZARDS IN

GREAT SHAPE? WORK OUT THE SKINKS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals L

Indian bowling looks bleak, says Akram

Cricket

PTI, New Delhi

As Indian pacers failed to make an impression against England, former Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram says the future of Indian bowling looks "bleak" and it's time that the new faces get a chance in the team.

Apart from Pragyan Ojha (20 wickets) and Ravichandran Ashwin (12), no Indian bowler bagged more than five wickets in the series, which India lost 1-2.

"To be very honest, the future of Indian bowling looks bleak. Zaheer Khan looked average in the three Tests and then got dropped. Ishant Sharma was okay in patches but after five years at the international level you have to be more consistent.

"I am afraid he is going the Mohammad Sami way -- a wasted talent. Umesh Yadav seems to be injury prone and the selectors don't pick Varun Aaron," Akram told espanstar.com.

Akram said time has come that the

Indian selectors pick youngsters, who have potential to be successful at international level.

"It's time that India look for new faces or tell the present bunch to shape up or ship out. I will suggest a certain Shami Ahmed to get a look in. The Bengal pacer is just 22 years old but has tremendous potential. Having worked with him for Kolkata Knight Riders from 2011 season, I believe bowlers like him are the forward for Team India," the KKR consultant said.

Akram also said that the England's support staff was better equipped than its Indian counterpart.

"The lack of planning in the Indian team was pretty visible even on the television screens and that reflected on the bowling front as well. It seemed the bowlers were going through the motion rather than planning their wickets.

"England's team director Andy Flower, bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmad and batting coach Graham Gooch were all in sync unlike the Indian backroom staff," said Akram.

Pay rise at Aus Open

Tennis

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australian Open organisers increased prize money for the early losers at the opening Grand Slam of the season to record levels on Thursday, a move which is likely to quell player unrest and end talk of a strike.

The Australian Open will now pay more prize money per round than any other tournament, with increases also coming in doubles and qualifying matches, but mixed doubles saw a money freeze.

The biggest increases were for first round losers in the men's and women's singles, who will now receive 27,600 Australian dollars, representing a 32.7 per cent boost from 2012, with those exiting in the second round taking home 45,500 Australian dollars, up 36.6 per cent.

A sense of vulnerability

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questions regarding the problems that originated from last year.

"The media has portrayed us as the villains," said Salim Chowdhury, owner of the Dhaka Gladiators. "I have cleared most of my dues to the players and while there is a little left, it will be given in time. In fact Dhaka Gladiators still have to receive money from various places. The media don't talk about that," claimed Chowdhury.

While Chowdhury reassured the media, owner of the Chittagong Kings Sameer Quader Chowdhury, on the other hand, played down the dispute with left-hander Tamim Iqbal which dominated last year's league, and stated, "I tried to buy him again, but couldn't."

A similar feature was witnessed in the national cricketers' approach as well. "I only received 65 lakhs from last year's competition and I still have to receive a lot more," said Nasir Hossain in a telephonic

conversation with The Daily Star. The all-rounder who was bought for 208,000 dollars by the Rangpur Riders, one of the highest buys yesterday, provided a more reserved approach as compared to his celebratory mode last year after he was bought for 200,000 dollars by Khulna. "I feel alright. The deal was not so bad," replied Nasir when asked about how he felt.

Pacer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who was retained by the Gladiators for 141,000 dollars, echoed Hossain's sentiments.

"There has to be transparency while dealing with money. The previous experience of many cricketers isn't good. So everybody is worried because of this. Commitments must be kept," said Mortaza. "I hope the incidents that took place last year don't recur," he added.

However, with no official agreements signed between the franchisees, the Bangladesh Cricket Board and Game On Sports as yet, fears of a similar backlash continue to prevail amongst many.