

## Isinbayeva to start in May

AFP, Moscow

Pole vault world record holder Yelena Isinbayeva will make her first appearance of the season at next month's Diamond League meeting in Shanghai, the Russian athletics federation (VFLA) said on Thursday.

Media reports suggested Isinbayeva was considering retirement after failing to win her third consecutive gold at last year's London Olympics and then missing the indoor season.

However, VFLA chief Valentin Balakhnichyov said the 30-year-old would definitely compete at the world championships in Moscow in August.

"She has been training hard. She wants to come back stronger than ever," Balakhnichyov told Reuters this week.

## Armstrong sells estate

AFP, Austin

Disgraced US cyclist Lance Armstrong, who is the subject of multiple lawsuits after confessing to doping, has sold his property in Austin, it was reported Thursday.

The Austin American Statesman reported that Armstrong had sold the luxurious 1.7-acre Spanish-style estate he bought in 2004 but planned to continue living in the Texas city.

Armstrong, has been stripped of his seven Tour de France titles and abandoned by former sponsors after finally admitting he took performance-enhancing drugs.

## Sunrisers

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crossed the line thanks to a boundary from Steyn.

Earlier, some superb bowling from Steyn, ably supported by the rest of the crew, restricted Delhi to 114-8 from their 20 overs. Steyn took two wickets, but more importantly, gave away just 11 in his four overs. Ishant Sharma also grabbed a double along with Thisara Perera as Hyderabad dominated the Delhi batting.

Only some late hitting from Kedar Jhadav and Irfan Pathan gave Delhi's score some semblance of respectability and in the end it might have even proved enough, had it not been for the intervention of the Hyderabad batsmen.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**DELHI DAREDEVILS:** 114 for 8 from 20 overs (Jadhav 30; Steyn 2-11) lost to, **SUNRISERS HYDERABAD:** 115 for 7 from 19.2 overs (Sangakkara 28; Nadeem 2-17)

**Man of the match:** Amit Mishra

## Athletics not

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politics, are unwilling to accept a change in the schedule to make room for the other, which meant that the athletics events will have to be staged earlier.

"We have tried to make them understand but no one wanted to accept the possible change in the schedules. However, we will try to keep at least one or two athletics events on the concluding day of the Games," said Games steering Committee chairman Harunur Rashid yesterday.

A total 36 events of athletics are scheduled to be completed in three days from April 22 to 24 while 22 events of cycling are scheduled for April 25-28.



Fenerbahce midfielder Caner Erkin (L) is ecstatic after scoring against Lazio during their Europa League encounter at Rome's Olympic Stadium on Thursday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw.

PHOTO: AFP

## CLT20 in India

Cricket

IANS, New Delhi

The Champions League Twenty20 will return to India for the third time in five years and take place from Sep 17 to Oct 6.

The tournament will follow a similar format to the two previous editions with a Group Stage preceded by a Qualifier. A total of 29 matches will be played in the tournament by the best domestic T20 teams from around the world.

As well as finalising the timing and format, the CLT20 Governing Council has also confirmed the teams that will compete for a total prize money of \$6 million.

Trinidad & Tobago, who were the runners-up in the inaugural edition of the tournament in 2009, have earned direct entry into the Group Stage this year after playing in the Qualifier in 2011 and 2012.

The CLT20 Governing Council has been advised by the England and Wales Cricket Board that its teams are not available to participate in this year's tournament.

"The competition, which will again feature leading cricketers from across the world and some of the established legends of world cricket, will be watched and followed by equally passionate fans," N.

Srinivasan, Chairman, CLT20 Governing Council, said.

The Qualifier will feature four teams -- the fourth-ranked team from IPL 2013, Otago Volts (New Zealand's HRV Cup champions), and the winners of the Sri Lanka and Pakistan domestic T20 competitions.

The teams will play each other once, with the top two advancing to the Group Stage.

The Group Stage will feature 10 teams. Group A will comprise the winner and third-ranked team in the IPL, Highveld Lions (winner of South Africa's RAM SLAM T20 Challenge), Perth Scorchers (KFC T20 Big Bash League runner-up), and the top team from the CLT20 2013 Qualifier.

Group B will comprise Brisbane Heat (KFC T20 Big Bash League champion), Trinidad & Tobago (West Indies T20 champion), IPL runner-up, Titans (RAM SLAM T20 Challenge runner-up), and the second-ranked team from the CLT20 2013 Qualifier.

The top team from Group A will play the second-ranked team from Group B, and vice versa, in the semi-finals. The winners of the semis will play in the final.

The venues of the CLT20 will be decided at the end of the IPL.

## Chelsea drawn with Basel

AFP, Nyon

English Premiership giants Chelsea and traditional European powerhouse Benfica were on Friday both drawn against smaller opposition for the semifinals of the Europa League.

The draw at UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, saw the Londoners draw Swiss outfit Basel while the Portuguese will take on Fenerbahce of Turkey.

Chelsea are bidding to become only the fourth team in history to win all three of European football's club competitions.

Having already won the Champions League last year and the Cup Winners' Cup in 1971 and 1998, they now hope to add the Europa League to join the likes of Juventus, Ajax and Bayern Munich in doing the European treble.

Benfica are bidding for their first European trophy since their glory years of the 1960s.

They reached the final of the old UEFA Cup in 1983 but were beaten 2-1 on aggregate by Belgian side Anderlecht.

None of the four semi-finalists has ever won the competition before.

Fenerbahce and Basel will host the first legs on April 25 with the return fixtures due to be played on May 2.

### FIXTURES

Fenerbahce (TUR) v Benfica (POR)  
Basel (SUI) v Chelsea (ENG)  
Matches to be played on April 25 and May 2.

## Double tons

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their lead to 92 runs as they made 67 for two in their second innings before stumps were drawn for the third day.

Rifat Pradhan and first innings hero Jubair Hossain took one wicket each.

## Jibon powers

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in with a strike in the 31st minute. Sajidur Rahman pulled one goal back for Victoria in the 51st minute.

## Oldies braced for newbie bids

Tennis

AFP, Paris

It's 10 years since the rankings didn't feature either Rafael Nadal or Roger Federer in the top two, but current leading men, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray, still face a test of claycourt nerve.

On Sunday, Nadal begins his bid for a ninth successive Monte Carlo Masters title.

The 26-year-old Spaniard, who was seven months out of action with a knee injury, has already hammered home his claycourt dominance in 2013 with comeback titles at Sao Paulo and Acapulco.

The seven-time French Open champion romped through the Latin American claycourt swing with a 12-1 record.

His clay record for the last 12 months reads 35-2, although his fitness faces another gruelling challenge on European clay this year.

Nadal, currently the world number five, has a mountain of points to defend after he clinched Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Rome and the French Open in 2012.

His only blip last year was a last-16 defeat to compatriot Fernando Verdasco in Madrid on the hated blue clay which has since been banned.

Nadal is desperate to return to clay on which has won 38 of his 53 career titles.

"I missed the feeling of going onto a big stadium with all the people, all this atmosphere that makes you feel something different," said Nadal who added the

Indian Wells Masters hardcourt title to his CV in March.

"And the feeling of victory, the feeling of competition, this adrenaline in life."

Federer, with his 32nd birthday fast approaching, is sitting out Monte Carlo, but his claycourt record -- 10 titles on the surface -- is 15-2 over the past 12 months.

That puts him second only to Nadal having captured the Madrid crown in 2012 before succumbing to Djokovic in the semi-finals in Rome and Roland Garros.

World number one Djokovic, the runner-up to Nadal at Monte Carlo in 2009 and 2012, goes into the tournament confident that a right ankle injury sustained on Davis Cup duty won't limit his chances.

"After seeing the results of all the tests we did, I am really positive and strong," Djokovic wrote on his Facebook page.

"I'm doing the best I can with my team to recover fast and be ready for the upcoming tournaments."

Djokovic's defeat to Nadal in the French Open final last year ended his hopes of completing a career Grand Slam.

The Serb failed to lift a claycourt title in 2012 having swept Rome, Madrid and Belgrade 12 months earlier.

Murray remains an enigma on clay.

The US Open and Olympic champion has collected 26 career titles but has never reached a claycourt final, let alone lift a trophy.

Last year, the Scot managed just quarter-final runs at the French Open, Monte Carlo and Barcelona.

## Real's good-luck charm from LA

GRANT WAHL, Sports Illustrated.com

(Continued from yesterday)

Rodriguez raced up to his hotel room and grabbed his passport. Mourinho took a picture of it with his cell-phone camera and sent it to the club's organizers to put him on the travel list.

You never know when karma will come back and reward you for something. For seven summers Rodriguez worked for free for Real Madrid, even when the club was willing to pay him for his efforts in Los Angeles. Now he was about to experience the thrill of a lifetime.

The next four days were a whirlwind. On March 2, Rodriguez watched Real Madrid beat Barcelona 2-1 in Estadio Bernabeu. The club gave him a good seat, and afterward Rodriguez visited the locker room, where he had his picture taken next to Cristiano Ronaldo and Maradona, who'd attended the game.

Then came the trip to Manchester. Rodriguez was a member of the Real Madrid team this time, working as one of the equipment managers and dressed in full team gear. He helped assemble the bags for the flight to England, and he worked the team's training session the day before the game at Manchester City's Etihad Stadium. By now, Mourinho and the Real Madrid players were viewing him as a good-luck charm, going so far as to rub his stomach for positive vibes.

On March 5 at Old Trafford -- the Theatre of Dreams -- Rodriguez fulfilled one of his own lifelong dreams, and in doing so became one of the great Zelig figures in world soccer. His family and friends in LA saw him walk off the field next to Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson at one point. A few seconds before that, United star Chicharito Hernandez had pulled Rodriguez aside to tell him he'd give him his game-worn jersey after the final whistle. (Unknown to Rodriguez, Mourinho had told Hernandez about his Mexican-born friend and asked if he could do him the favour.)

"These people treated me like I was part of the team," Rodriguez said. "This is something I'll tell my grandkids."

Real Madrid ended up advancing, of course, in a game that will be remembered by many for the controversial red card given to United's Nani, a call that changed the match. But even though Ferguson was so angry afterward that he refused to speak at the press conference, Rodriguez saw firsthand that he was still willing to share a post-game drink with Mourinho. Said Rodriguez, "He came out of the dressing room with a cup of wine in his hand, and he told me, 'Tell Jose that the wine is ready, and tell him to hurry up.'"

"You are true gentlemen," Rodriguez said to the two managers, and Ferguson winked and even took a moment to sign the American's book of pictures with top European players and coaches.

There were other memorable moments after the game that day. Outside United's locker room, Hernandez followed up on his pledge and gave Rodriguez his game-worn jersey with a personalised dedication on it.

"The first thing he said to me was, 'How long have you been working for Real Madrid?'" Rodriguez said. "I said, 'The truth is I don't work for them.' I explained to him what happened, and he looked shocked at the beginning. But he said, 'You know what? That's amazing.'"

Back in Madrid's locker room, fullback Marcelo asked Rodriguez if he'd take his jersey over to United's locker room and try to trade it for Robin van Persie's. Rodriguez executed the exchange with a United trainer but decided to have some fun with Marcelo, hiding RVP's shirt behind his back and telling the Brazilian: "He said he'll exchange the jersey with someone else, but not you."

"Really?" Marcelo asked.

"I'm kidding," came the reply. "Here's the jersey."

In the end, Rodriguez took plenty of keepsakes of his own back to Los Angeles. They were gifts from people who knew his story: jerseys from Chicharito, Ozil, Kaka and Michael Essien, as well as Kaka's cleats and even one of the match balls from the game.

But the memories are worth even more, he said. On Real Madrid's victorious team flight back to the Spanish capital, Mourinho was moving between the aisles, sharing glasses of wine with members of the delegation, and every so often he'd stop and point and wink at his friend Abel, the good-luck charm from America.

"Everybody at Real Madrid was happy," Mourinho said, "because they know him from preseason and know he is a hard worker and a great person. He was with us and we won both matches! People were saying he has to stay."

On the night the plane from Manchester landed back in Madrid, Rodriguez said, he didn't get the chance to say thank you to Mourinho. Ever the worker, he finished his duties as an equipment guy unloading the plane.

He still doesn't have any contact information for Mourinho. So this story is his way of saying thank you.

## Akram not marrying Sen

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket icon Wasim Akram demanded privacy and respect from fans and media alike Friday, calling for an end "once and for all" to rumours he is marrying Bollywood heroine Sushmita Sen.

The famed paceman has been linked constantly in the media to the 1994 Miss Universe since they were judges in 2008 Indian dance show "Aik Khilari, Aik Haseena" (A player, a beauty).

Wasim, a widower since his wife Humaid died in October 2009, said he is fed up.

"I am tired of denying such rumours and now I want this to end once and for all," Wasim told AFP after Indian media claimed Thursday that the couple were about to tie the knot in Mumbai.

Pakistani television channels also splashed the story, hotly anticipating another high-profile cross-border union after the 2010 nuptials of Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik and Indian tennis ace Sania Mirza.

Wasim said he and Sen are good friends only.

"She is one of the most graceful and decent ladies I have come across," said Wasim of the 37-year-old Bollywood star. "It was huge fun working as judge with Sushmita as she is a thorough professional and presents herself gracefully."

The dance show also featured Indian cricket stars Harbhajan Singh, Dinesh Karthik, Irfan Pathan, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Nikhil Chopra and Vinod Kamble and was also telecast on a leading Pakistani channel.

Wasim described the show as a good experience.

"The show was well received and was admired across the borders and that was it. If I get another chance to work with her I will do but I want the media of both the countries to respect us," said Wasim.

Wasim said he is devoted to bringing up his two sons, Taimur and Akbar.

"I want to bring them up and make them good and successful human beings, so my life is devoted to my sons," said Wasim.

Sen has two adopted daughters and has yet to marry.

Wasim said their personal lives should be respected.

"I have my own personal life and she has her own, so the media and fans should not disrespect that," said Wasim, who has taken a year's leave as a bowling coach in the Indian Premier League to spend time with sons.

"I have always felt at home in India and the kind of respect I get in India is very pleasing so I will continue to work as and when I get time, but as my sons also needed time I have taken leave from the IPL this year," said Wasim.

## Haas crashes out

Tennis

AFP, Houston

Second seed Tommy Haas crashed out of the US Clay Court Championships in Houston on Thursday, suffering a straight sets defeat to Ricardas Berankis of Lithuania.

The German veteran -- who had inflicted a shock defeat on world number one Novak Djokovic at the Miami Masters last month -- was sent tumbling out 6-3, 6-3 at the River Oaks Country Club.

It was just the second time this

year the 35-year-old Haas lost his opening match.

"It started off pretty weird and it didn't really give me that much confidence for the rest of the match," he said. "I felt if I could've held serve in the first game then things would've been a little different."

Berankis said: "I think I had the advantage because for me it was the second match. For the first clay-court matches it's a big advantage. I used it well to get my rhythm."

In other matches on Thursday, Nicolas Almagro continued his dominance of Gael Monfils on clay by rallying past the former world num-

ber seven 2-6, 6-0, 6-3 in their second round tie.

Almagro, of Spain, has now won three of five career meetings against the Frenchman, including all three times they have met on the clay surface.

Almagro finished with three aces, one double fault and won 74 percent of his first-serve points in the 85-minute match.

Almagro advances to the third round where he will face Paolo Lorenzi who won an all-Italian duel by beating Flavio Cipolla 7-6 (7/4), 6-1

Last year's Houston runner-up John Isner was also a second-round winner Thursday.