

NZ duo released for England

AFP, London

New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum and key batsman Ross Taylor are set for an earlier than anticipated arrival in England after being granted early release by their Indian Premier League sides.

The pair were not expected to arrive on the tour of England until after the completion of this weekend's inaugural three-day warm-up match against Derbyshire.

But McCullum and Taylor will now have more time to get used to English conditions before the two-match Test series gets underway at Lord's later this month.

KKR speed past Royals

SPORTS DESK

Strong knocks from Yusuf Pathan and Jacques Kallis propelled Kolkata Knight Riders to a comprehensive 8 wicket win over the Rajasthan Royals during their IPL clash at Eden Gardens last night.

Pathan (49) and Kallis (29) associated in an unbeaten 78-run partnership as KKR coasted home with eight wickets to spare.

Earlier, a disciplined bowling performance from Kolkata masked a sparkling knock of 40 from young Sanju Samson as Rajasthan were restricted to just 132 for the loss of six wickets in their 20 overs.

Senanayake was the pick of the Kolkata bowlers with 2-26.

SCORES IN BRIEF
RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 132-6 in 20 overs (Samson 40; Senanayake 2-26)
KKR: 133-2 in 17.2 overs (Pathan 49, Kallis 29)
Result: KKR win by 8 wickets.

Challenge

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Champions and runners-up from four-team group will advance to the six-team finals.

Fulham

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website already offering them for sale.

Fulham is managed by Dutchman Martin Jol and count Dimitar Berbatov among their stars.

Arambagh

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and we must all take this responsibility which is not only for the footballers," said Arambagh KS joint secretary Ezaz Hossain Jahangir yesterday.

On the other hand, Team BJMC toppled Mohammedan to finish fourth with 26 points from 16 matches.

Nadal hits

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order to gain an unfair advantage in their sport.

"I find it unfair that the names of the cheats are not given, whether they're Spanish or not," said Nadal, according to the AS and Marca newspapers.

"The image that this verdict gives our country is not the best.

"It seems to me to be a mistake not to reveal the names of the cheats so that at least they can feel the contempt of fellow sportsmen and feel ashamed."

WADA and the Spanish anti-doping agency have both said they will appeal the ruling.

During the case, which ran from the end of January to the beginning of April, Fuentes claimed to have worked with athletes from a variety of sports.



PHOTO: CRICINFO

Sanju Samson of Rajasthan Royals hits down the ground during their Indian Premier League match against Kolkata Knight Riders in Kolkata yesterday.

Starc warns England



REUTERS, Sydney

Australia paceman Mitchell Starc is well on his way back to fitness and has warned England not to write off the tourists' chances of wrenching back the Ashes in July and August.

The tall left-armer, who left Australia's calamitous tour of India early to have surgery on his ankle, is expected to play a key role in the first of two Ashes series this year on England's swing-friendly pitches.

Selected for the tour alongside fellow quicks James Pattinson, Ryan Harris, Peter Siddle and Jackson Bird, Starc will form part of a bowling unit expected to have to play out of their skins to make up for Australia's fragile batting.

England won the last series convincingly 3-1 in Australia in 2010/11 and are strong favourites to retain the urn on home soil, especially after the Australians were drubbed 4-0 in India.

Starc, however, is confident his first Ashes action will not be in a losing cause.

"Obviously they're pretty confident at the moment with some of the things I've been hearing," the 23-year-old told Sydney's Daily Telegraph.

"We'll go in as underdogs, but we'll take

that tag and run with it. We have a good chance to show our doubters how good we can be and come back with that urn.

"We're going over to win, there's no other reason we're going over. We've had our doubters, but we'll go over to win and we'll compete very strongly."

Starc made his international debut in a one-dayer against India in Visakhapatnam in October 2010 but bone spurs in the same ankle prevented him from playing any part in the Ashes and limited overs World Cup that Australian summer.

Having had a second operation on the joint in March, Starc is confident he will be firing on all cylinders come June's Champions Trophy, which precedes the Ashes series in England.

"I've got more range in it now than I have had for three or four years since my first operation," Starc added of the ankle.

"It's feeling good and I'm easing back into it, but starting to ramp it up now with bowling next week. I've still got a couple of weeks up my belt to be ready to go for that first game in England.

"It's all been in the gym and fitness work and getting right to run again, but hopefully I'll bowl next week off a few steps. (I'm) taking a pretty aggressive approach on it, but I'm feeling good and I'm sure it will hold up."

All-star cast in Madrid



AFP, Madrid

Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer appear at the same claycourt event for the first time this season with the Madrid Masters a key test just three weeks out from the French Open.

The tournament returns to traditional red clay after a controversial experiment with blue clay in 2012.

The surface drew strong criticism from Nadal and Djokovic who threatened not to return to play in the Spanish capital if it wasn't changed.

However, ATP president Brad Drewett outlawed the use of blue clay and so seventh-time French Open winner Nadal and world number one Djokovic will return for another potentially fascinating clash.

Djokovic ended Nadal's eight-year reign as champion in Monte Carlo in the

Better late than never for Zia

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335 runs, the Tigers levelled the series with a 143-run win in the second Test and are now halfway to winning the three-match series. "After the first Test, morale was quite low," said Zia, who had arrived in the country as a replacement for Shahadat Hossain after the first Test. "But our skipper and team management said that if we can play to our potential in the second Test, we will win. In Harare the bowling did the job, the pitch was helpful and we went on to win well. I think this is a continuation of that morale boost."

Zia started off as a fast bowler but injury had forced him to switch to medium pace and concentrate on becoming an all-rounder. "I am bowling better than I am batting at the moment, so that gave me confidence. I did not give up on bowling. I concentrated on my batting after the injury. Now I am working on both skills."

Zimbabwe skipper Brendan Taylor was in quite a disconsolate mood and blamed the loss on his batsmen, who crumbled to 148 all out, for not learning from past mistakes. "I don't know what to say really.

The Bangladesh bowlers bowled well, they bowled stump to stump. That is what we expected, but they did not bowl anything that would get the majority of our batsmen out, the batsmen somehow found ways to get out.

"We have been saying the same thing for the last two months now. After the tour of West Indies we said that the batsmen must play straight, but they got out today playing across the line. There were too many batsmen bowled on a good pitch," said Taylor.

Bangladesh scored 269 for eight, a score that touring skipper Mushfiqur Rahim said was a safe one. "I had said that 280 is a chaseable score on this ground, but I still think we gave away too many today. Having said that, we will take 260 against Bangladesh on this pitch; it's the batting that let us down," Taylor said.

When asked whether he thought Zimbabwe could still win the series, Taylor said: "Of course you will have to believe that you can win the series, I believe we can. Bangladesh will be even harder to beat now that they have got confidence, they are a side that thrives on confidence."

Bopara gets surprise recall

AFP, London



Ravi Bopara's England exile came to an end Friday when the Essex all-rounder was named in the hosts' 15-man squad for next month's ICC Champions Trophy and the preceding one-day series with New Zealand.

Bopara has not played a 50-overs-a-side international since September and the stylish batsman and handy medium-pacer had not been selected in either of England one-day coach Ashley Giles's two previous squads in the format since the former Test spinner took charge of the limited overs side.

It seemed Bopara was fighting for his international future but he edged out fellow all-rounders Samit Patel, Luke Wright and Rikki Clarke.

Bopara's last four one-day international innings saw him manage just 22 runs in total at home to South Africa and he was omitted from the ODI squads for the recent tours of India and New Zealand.

"He's been given another opportunity because we know what he's capable of doing," England national selector Geoff Miller told Sky Sports.

"He's got all assets to his game -- there's the bowling aspect which has come on very, very well; batting-wise we know what he's capable of doing and he's very good in the field as well. He adds strength to the squad," the ex-England off-spinner added.

Bopara's inclusion aside, there were few surprises, with off-spinner Graeme Swann and seamer Tim Bresnan both recalled following elbow problems.

As expected, rising Yorkshire batting star Joe Root was included with

star stroke-maker Kevin Pietersen already ruled out of the Champions Trophy because of a knee injury.

Jos Buttler was given the chance to cement his claim to be England's one-day wicketkeeper, with Test gloveman Matt Prior again omitted from a limited overs squad. Jonny Bairstow will provide back-up with the gloves, with the Yorkshireman aiming to force his way in as a specialist batsman.

The key contest for England fans and, though they won't yet say so publicly, players and officials this season is the Ashes Test series at



RAVI BOPARA

Africa-born batsman's knee injury but added England were more than capable of coping without 'KP'.

"He's world-class and you want world-class in your side, but it's not to be on this occasion," said Miller.

"We're quietly confident we can do well, with or without Kevin Pietersen."

England have never won a major 50-over tournament and the three-time losing World Cup finalists were beaten by the West Indies at The Oval in the climax of the last Champions Trophy staged in England in 2004.

A side again set to be captained by Test skipper Alastair Cook play the first of three one-dayers against New Zealand at Lord's on May 31 before opening their Champions Trophy campaign against Australia at Edgbaston on June 8.

England squad for New Zealand one-day series and the ICC Champions Trophy:

Alastair Cook (capt), James Anderson, Jonny Bairstow, Ian Bell, Ravi Bopara, Tim Bresnan, Stuart Broad, Jos Buttler (wkt), Steven Finn, Eoin Morgan, Joe Root, Graeme Swann, James Tredwell, Jonathan Trott (Warwickshire), Chris Woakes.

African

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Not one to spurn the superstar treatment, we lapped it all up, and did not correct the mistake. So if you are at the Rainforest Restaurant of Victoria Falls and see pictures of unknown Bangladeshis on the walls, please just play along.

1,2,3, GOODBYE

Walking along the No Man's Land between the Zimbabwe and Zambia borders, trepidation gripped me. I was going to do the zipline from the Zambia side of the Zambezi gorge to the Victoria Falls bridge, which spans the gorge. If I survived that then I would do something they call the bridge swing, something many locals have told me in so many words is nothing like the bungee. If I survived that, having bought the package for all three, I would maybe think about the bungee jump.

The zipline was easy enough, the view below gorgeous as I sailed over the treacherous gorge, but with the accompanying fear that man's machinery could fail any minute and nature would take its course. Then came time for the bridge swing -- sounds harmless enough. The closer I got to the platform however, the slower my walk became. I was standing 128 metres above the rocks and rushing waters below. Truth be told I would have backed out had a colleague not been a witness, who would surely have laughed all the way back to Bangladesh if I did.

In a trance, I walked all the way to the edge, and the instructor counted to three and pushed his charge off into the abyss. Life does not flash before the eyes, not mine at least, but in the short seconds I was free-falling all I could do was pray that the rope holds. It did and I was swinging furiously tens of metres from the bottom, through rainbows created by the mist.

When finally I was pulled up, grateful but shaken, people urged me to go for the bungee. But feeling like you are going to die twice in a day was more than enough for me, thank you very much.

Anastasia fights back to final



AFP, Oeiras

Third seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova fought back from a first-set whitewash to beat unseeded Romina Oprandi prevail 0-6, 6-3, 6-1 on Friday to reach the women's final of the ATP/WTA Portugal Open.

The 19th-ranked Russian winner will bid for her second trophy this season after Monterrey, when she plays fourth seed and 2012 finalist Carla Suarez Navarro, who beat Estonian defending champion Kaia Kanepi 6-4, 6-1 in 66 minutes.

The Spanish winner benefitted from seven double-fault off of her Estonian opponent. "It's great to be in my second final here, it was a good match for me today.

"I did have last year's final in my mind. She started strong and I was a bit nervous. I served well and kept my intensity in the important moments."

Pavlyuchenkova said that after winning a quarter-final the day before which took almost three hours, she was just not fully recovered - especially with a morning start.

"I don't like to complain, but it was tough to start the match. I didn't recover well. But I'm happy with how I responded.

"I turned it around, kept believing and kept playing my game."

Pavlyuchenkova had few early answers



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova celebrates after winning a point against Swiss Romina Oprandi during their Portugal Open semifinal in Oeiras yesterday.