

BOLT BATTLES THE ELEMENTS

A new commercial from Nissan features the "fastest man who has ever lived" as he takes on a super fast trail of fire ahead of the Rio games. The advertisement dubbed "Bolt vs. Flame" showcases Usain Bolt talking about preparations for the Olympics before Bolt is told that he must participate in a race against a blazing trail of fire. Bolt manages to keep pace with the trail of flames, but who would have doubted him? The ad ends on a bit of a cliffhanger, as Bolt says: "Rio. I'm coming."  
—AGENCIES



# Abahani, Russel confident

SPORTS REPORTER

Former champions Abahani and Sheikh Russel KC are keen on winning the title of the JB Bangladesh Premier League, which begins on July 24, and are not concerned about traveling from one venue to another for the league matches. The Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) decision to host the league in phases in seven different venues across the country has been met with reservation from a few clubs as they believed hectic schedules and a lack of recovery time would be involved in such a format. The issue dominated the last day of the participating teams' presentation on the eve of the league at the BFF House yesterday, but most of the clubs present yesterday apparently supported the idea.

**ABAHANI**  
The four-time champions are eager on regaining the league title, as it has eluded them for the past three seasons, so this time around they have formed a strong squad which have already clinched the

Federation Cup title after their runners-up finish in the Independence Cup. "Last year we knew we wouldn't be champions, but this time there are four or five teams including us who are similar in strength, so we will try to win," said Abahani coach George Kottan, who believes his squad is better than last season's which had finished fourth.

"The new format will help Bangladesh football. Spreading the league across the country is a good idea. You should see what happens when it begins," opined the Austrian.

**SHEIKH RUSSEL KC**  
Shom of success the last two seasons, Sheikh Russel aim to bounce back to their treble winning form in the 2012-13 season when, in a rare occurrence, they won the professional football league. Hence they have now formed a well-equipped squad, one which made it to the semifinals of both the Independence Cup and the Federation Cup this year.

"Our target was to win every tournament, but we have failed to perform up to the mark. Now we are making preparations for the league, and want to give

our best to win," coach Maruful Haque said, adding that some of his key players were still recovering from injuries.

Maruful also added that he appreciates the new format, but at the same time urged the league committee to ensure time between matches for recovery.

**RAHMATGANJ MFS AND UTTAR BARIDHARA CLUB**

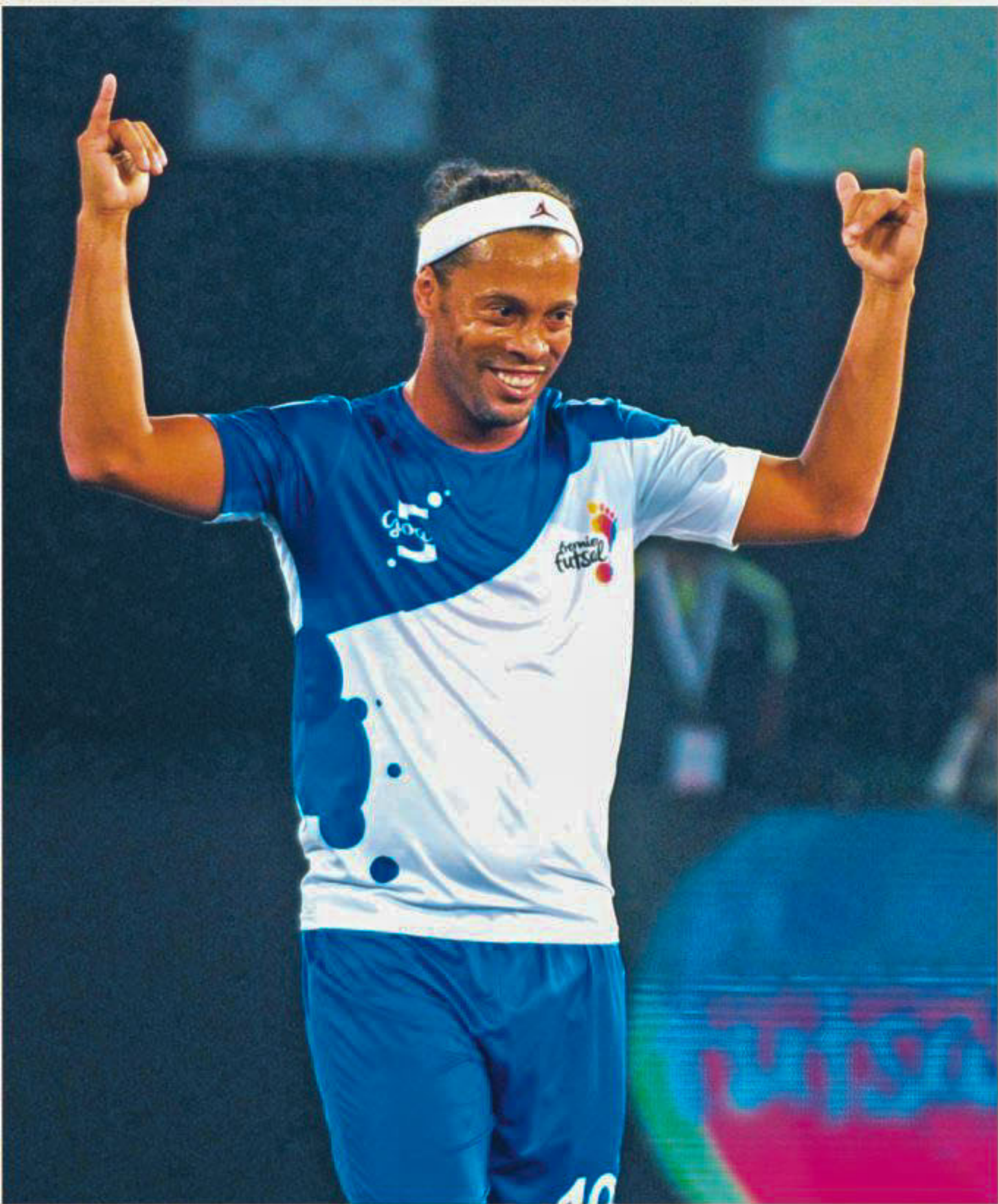
Despite the fact that they have never finished on the top half of the table in the professional league's history, Rahmatganj have set their sights high and claim to be playing for the title this year whereas Uttar Baridhara simply wish to retain their top-flight status after a middle place finish in the 12-team table.

"There is not much difference in the quality of players among the teams. My boys performed well in the last two tournaments which inspires me to fight for the title," said Rahmatganj coach Kamal Babu, who also backed the BFF's initiative to hold the league across the country.

"We want to stay in the Bangladesh Premier League by finishing either in fifth or in sixth position," said Uttar Baridhara coach Rashed Ahmed Pappu.



(From Left) Sohel Rana, Ariful Islam, Rasel Mahmud and Atiqur Rahman Meshu pose for their respective clubs during the last day of team presentation for the JB Bangladesh Premier League at the BFF House yesterday. PHOTO: STAR



With his ever-present smile flashing, Ronaldinho, playing for Goa 5, stepped onto India's Premier Futsal League and wowed the crowd, scoring five goals against Bengaluru 5 as his side ran out 7-2 winners. PHOTO: AFP

## Ronaldo for Ballon d'Or: Neymar

AGENCIES, Madrid

The winner of the next Ballon d'Or award won't be named for another six months, but Neymar is pretty sure who will be.

Neymar has picked Cristiano Ronaldo over Barcelona teammate Lionel Messi as the favorite to win the 2016 Ballon d'Or, which is the highest individual honor a player can win.

"Ronaldo won the Champions League and now Euro 2016 as well," Neymar was quoted as telling a Brazilian media outlet. "So I believe he is in a good position. Plus, Ronaldo is a great player. I have no qualms in saying that."

It seems to be a flaw in the award that it's already apparent who will win it with half of the time period to be judged remaining. But Neymar does have a point: With a Champions League trophy and a European Championship trophy in the bag, how can anyone possibly compete with Ronaldo's year?

## I want to coach Arsenal: Henry

AGENCIES, Paris

Arsenal legend Thierry Henry has admitted that he would want to coach the Premier League heavyweights sometime in the future.

Henry, who is Arsenal's all-time record goalscorer, was set to manage their under-18s this summer, but the plan fell apart.

"I'd be lying if I told you being manager [of Arsenal] wasn't a wish that I have because I love Arsenal," Henry was quoted as saying by The Sun on Saturday. "The game is my passion and always will be. I would like to manage -- but I am far from it."

The 38-year-old acquired his UEFA A license earlier this year but insisted he is bent on obtaining a UEFA Pro-advanced version.

"Although I am able to manage any team now, I would still like to pass my UEFA Pro Licence to give me a better all-round knowledge," he said.

"Before you can think of becoming a first-team coach you need to have experience. That is what I'm trying to get and to complete the necessary coaching hours that are needed."

The 1998 World Cup winner also added that he felt he could make a difference coaching the Arsenal Under-18s, but even though he has not got the job he would carry on supporting the team.

# USA, Canada launch 'unfair' campaign against Russia

AFP, Los Angeles



A North American-led campaign to ban Russia from the Rio de Janeiro Olympics has opened up an international divide on how to deal with the doping scandal engulfing Russia.

European Olympic Committees (EOC) president Pat Hickey said he was "shocked" by a move led by the United States and Canada to have Russia completely banned from the Summer Games, which start in Rio on August 5.

Hickey said he was alerted to the move when the head of the World Anti-Doping Agency's athletes commission sent out an appeal for backing for the campaign.

Russia is already banned from international athletics because of a doping storm.

And on Monday Canadian lawyer Richard McLaren's report is due on his investigation of allegations that the Russian government manipulated doping samples taken at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics to protect Russian competitors.

But Hickey said a US-Canadian attempt to get a blanket ban before the report's "has shocked and concerned me on a number of levels".

"My concern is that there seems to have been an attempt to agree an out-

come before any evidence has been presented," Hickey said.

"Such interference and calls ahead of the McLaren Report publication are totally against internationally recognised fair legal process and may have completely undermined the integrity and therefore the credibility of this important report."

Hickey said that Beckie Scott, the Canadian chairman of the WADA athletes commission and an IOC member, had sent an email appeal to back a letter from the US and Canadian anti-doping agencies to IOC president Thomas Bach.

"This letter calls upon the IOC to instigate a wholesale ban of the Russian Olympic Committee team in Rio 2016."

"This unprecedented call for such a ban is based on what the US and Canadian national anti-doping agencies say are the findings of the independent McLaren Report."

Hickey said the McLaren report is meant to remain confidential until its publication on Monday.

"It is clear from the e-mail and letter that both the independence and the confidentiality of the report have been compromised," he said.

Hickey's disquiet was echoed by Olympic chiefs from Croatia and Greece.

"It seems incredible that important members of the Olympic Movement are seeking to build a global coalition to get another National Olympic

Committee banned even before the requisite evidence has been published," Zlatko Matesa, EOC executive member and president of the Croatian Olympic Committee said.

He added: "This is not in the Olympic spirit and casts a shadow over the integrity of the McLaren report."

His Greek counterpart, Spyros Capralos, said: "All of us want zero tolerance of doping and all forms of cheating in sport. However this must be conducted in an open and transparent way, not through building alliances of national prejudice based on supposition rather than evidence."

According to Hickey, three European anti-doping agencies have been approached to sign the US-Canadian letter.

"It is clear that only athletes and organisations known to support a ban of the Russian Olympic team have been contacted," he said.

"I have to question on what authority the USA and Canadian anti-doping agencies prepared their letter and what mandate they have to lead an international call for a ban of another nation in the Olympic family."

"Whilst I fully understand and share international concerns over the recent doping allegations, we cannot allow any individuals or groups to interfere or damage the integrity of fair and due legal process."

## 'Higuain didn't ask to leave'

AGENCIES, Naples

Napoli have insisted that Gonzalo Higuain has not asked to leave and say Juventus have not put in a request to sign him.

The Argentina international has been heavily linked with both Serie A champions Juve and Arsenal, with a €94million release clause reportedly tempting those clubs.

Higuain's brother and agent Nicolas said last month that his client would not be renewing his contract with last season's Serie A runners-up Napoli, which has two years left to run.

Despite the frenzied links with domestic rivals Juventus, Napoli have stressed that little has changed regarding the 28-year-old, who scored 36 league goals in 2015-16.

"Gonzalo never said he wanted to leave," Napoli's head of communications Nicola Lombardo said at a Q&A with supporters at the club's training base in Dimaro.

"Juve have never asked for him and [President] Aurelio De Laurentiis does not want to sell him."

"We are talking about rumours that are fuelled by the press, who write story upon story. But he will be here in Dimaro to start pre-season on July 25."

# Kante was my target: Conte

AFP, Vienna



Chelsea coach Antonio Conte hailed the signing of N'Golo Kante after the France international joined from Premier League champions Leicester City on Saturday.

Kante, 25, became Chelsea's second major signing this month, following the arrival of Michy Batshuayi from Marseille, after the Blues paid a reported 32 million pounds for the defensive midfielder.

"I want to say Kante was a target and for this reason I'm very happy the club bought the player," said Conte, after watching Chelsea lose 2-0 to Rapid Vienna in his first match in charge.

"He's a good player. He has good technique, fantastic stamina and I like this type of player. If you want to win then a team needs this type of player that works hard for the team."

"All together we are working to improve the squad. We know we have to but we prefer to wait and go for our targets, rather than go with emotion and take the players who don't adapt to our idea of football."

Conte fielded an experienced side with John Terry named as captain for Saturday's pre-season friendly against Rapid in the Austrian capital.

The Italian also handed starts to several first-team regulars including Diego Costa, Nemanja Matic, Willian and Branislav Ivanovic, but the English giants fell behind when Brazilian teenager Joelinton scored after just eight minutes.

Chelsea academy product Ola Aina fired against the post in the second half. However, Rapid struck again through Tomi Correa on 82 minutes to wrap up the victory.

"This is the first game for us but I knew it would be very difficult after three days of double training," said Conte.

"I think it was a bit normal to meet these difficulties in the game, but I don't like to lose and it's the same for my players."

Conte, who steered an unfancied Italy side into the quarter-finals of Euro 2016 before losing to Germany on penalties, said Chelsea's ultimate goal this season was to challenge for the title after a lowly 10th-place finish last term.

# Zizou, Perez in conflict over Odegaard

AGENCIES, Madrid



LFP

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez and manager Zinedine Zidane have been engaged in a power struggle after the former insisted that Martin Odegaard -- a 17 year old who was signed for a fee in the region of 3 million euros last year -- travel with the squad on Real Madrid's pre-season tour.

This prompted some conflict between the two as Zidane reportedly preferred not to have the Norwegian in the squad this time. Le10Sport, a Spanish Daily who reported the story, referred to it as "interference of the president in the manager's work". It also stated that the Spanish

club were looking for a German team to loan out the young Norwegian to.

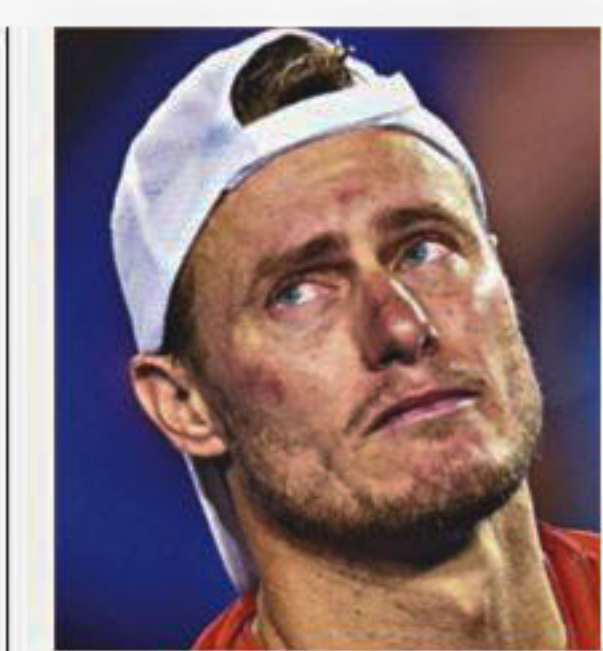
Odegaard was brought to Madrid on the 22 January 2015. The then-16-year-old came from Stromsgodset and signed for six years with what could be described as a 'mini-galactico' salary of around 1.2 million euros -- something that didn't sit well with the rest of the youth squad.

Once incorporated into the club he never really settled and hasn't yet shown enough of the potential that was being invested in.

Another problem that has been inherited by the new manager in respect of Florentino's demands for the player is that his contract stipulates that he must train with the first team five days per week. This didn't sit well with Zidane who saw the shortcomings of the player adapting appropriately across the two areas of the club.



Martin Odegaard has failed to impress so far and now finds himself in a conflict between coach Zinedine Zidane and Real Madrid president Florentino Perez. PHOTO: DAILY MAIL



## Hewitt pulls out of Rio coaching role

REUTERS, Melbourne

Two-time grand slam champion Lleyton Hewitt has opted out of his role as coach of the Australian men's tennis team at the Rio Olympics for "personal reasons", local media reported on Sunday.

Hewitt's withdrawal is another blow for Australia's prospects after top-ranked players Nick Kyrgios and Bernard Tomic withdrew.

Tennis Australia had applied to the Australian Olympic Committee to replace Hewitt with former professional Mark Draper, Australian Associated Press said.

Hewitt's agent and Tennis Australia were unable to be reached for comment.

Thanasi Kokkinakis and John Millman are representing Australia in the men's singles at Rio, with John Peers and Chris Guccione in the doubles.