

US cricket breaks new ground with Ireland series

AFP, Miami

Cricket in the United States will break new ground next week when Ireland embark on a landmark five-game tour as moves continue to establish the game in North America.

The two Twenty20 and three one-day, 50-over international matches (ODIs) taking place in Lauderdale, Florida starting on Wednesday will be the first time the US national team has faced a Test-playing nation on home soil.

That in itself will serve as an important moment for American cricket, which has failed to take root in the United States despite first being played in North America in the 18th century.

Yet with firm plans in the works to help establish a T20 professional League within the next two years, which in turn may boost chances of cricket making its Olympic debut in Los Angeles at the 2028 Games, the timing of Ireland's visit couldn't be better.

Furthermore, this is the first home series since confirmation that the US will co-host the 2024 T20 World Cup with the West Indies.

USA are currently ranked 18th in the world for ODIs, according to the International Cricket Council, the sport's governing body, and although Ireland are currently 12th -- for T20

the rankings are 30 and 13 respectively -- there is a strong belief that the Americans can upset the form book.

"This is the biggest home series we have had," USA captain Monank Patel told AFP. "This means a lot to the team and this acts as the start for the global qualifiers for the big tournaments coming up," the Gujarat-born wicketkeeper added.

US optimism is also based on the emergence of a promising crop of youth players, which includes highly-rated wicketkeeper Rahul Jariwala, 17, and 19-year-old left-arm spinner Vatsal Vaghela, who have both earned call-ups for the first time.

Both come from Northern California and impressed recently in a 50-over National Championships.

Led by San Francisco 49ers executive CEO Paraag Marathe, USA Cricket has reformed and refocused, not only looking to establish strong community links but also pushing the national team further into the conversation.

USA Cricket claims there are over 200,000 playing at the grassroots, mostly of South Asian heritage.

National success would help raise interest levels in the sport and although qualification for the most recent Twenty20 World Cup ended in failure, with another opportunity up for grabs in 2022, joining the party in Australia is a realistic ambition.



AUSTRALIAN OPEN Nadal casts doubt over participation

REUTERS

Spain's Rafa Nadal said he cannot guarantee he will make the trip to Melbourne for next month's Australian Open after returning to action at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi.

The 20-times Grand Slam champion's comeback at the exhibition event -- his first tournament appearance since the Citi Open in Washington



in August -- ended in two close defeats by Andy Murray and Denis Shapovalov.

Nadal, 35, spent four months on the sidelines with a foot injury. He was knocked out at Roland Garros in the semi-finals and was forced to pull out of Wimbledon, the Tokyo Olympics and the U.S. Open. "The idea is to go there and try my best there in Australia... Being 100% honest, I can't guarantee it," Nadal said. World number six Nadal said he would not have returned to tennis if he did not feel he was competitive enough.

The Australian Open begins on January 17.



Australia pacer Mitchell Starc removed England captain Joe Root with the last ball of Day Four to put his side firmly on course for victory in the second Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

A painful day for Root

AGENCIES

England captain Joe Root fell in the final over of the fourth day to leave England in deep trouble at 82 for four chasing a massive 468 to win the second Ashes Test, needing a history-making miracle to avoid slumping 2-0 down in the series.

Starc floored Root with a painful blow to his abdomen before dismissing the England captain to cap another satisfying day for Australia.

"Root is a huge wicket, he is in fantastic form," Australia vice-captain Travis Head said. "I have a lot of sympathy for him. We got told to give him some space (on the pitch).

"Starc on that line is never pretty and unfortunately with the day he (Root) has had it wasn't a great time to get hit."

No team has ever posted such a big score in a fourth innings to win in the history of Test cricket -- with the West Indies' 418 for seven in beating Steve Waugh's Australia at St John's in 2003 the highest.

For all the pain Root was subjected to after his day was bookended by a couple of brutal blows to what team officials politely described as his "abdomen", a more lingering hurt looms with his team staring at a 0-2 Ashes scoreline.

Root was dismissed from what proved the last ball of the day four, caught behind off his evening tormentor Mitchell Starc for 24. It capped what would have been a forgettable day for Root and his team if only it had not been etched as deeply in his memory as he burned with pain.

Root was absent from the field throughout yesterday's first session after being hit in the unprotected zone by a member of the support staff providing gentle throwdowns before play began, but returned only to cop a far more ferocious hit from Starc shortly before stumps.

Travis Head (51 off 54 balls) led the charge for quickfire runs on day four before Jhye Richardson (2-17) shone under lights to edge the home side closer to victory.

England's problems stem from being bowled out, after a batting

collapse, for 236 on Saturday in reply to Australia's 473 for nine declared.

England are still 386 runs adrift, facing the near impossible task of batting out three sessions on the final day to salvage a draw with only six wickets remaining and the world's number one ranked Test batsman back in the pavilion.

The hosts resumed their second innings at 45 for one and declared on 230 for nine midway through the second session, giving their bowlers a crack at England with the pink ball as twilight loomed.

They immediately made inroads with Jhye Richardson steaming in to Haseeb Hameed and the ball flying off his glove to wicketkeeper Alex Carey without scoring.

David Malan, who hit 80 in the first innings, was dropped by Steve Smith, but only lasted three more balls before debutant Michael Naser trapped him lbw for 20.

Opener Rory Burns was desperate for a big score after a lean spell and managed 34, but was then beaten by Richardson's sheer pace, edging to Smith at slip.

'Fenomeno' buys second division club Cruzeiro

AGENCIES

Former Brazil striker Ronaldo said on Saturday that he was buying Cruzeiro, the club where he made his professional debut, but which has been languishing in Brazil's Serie B for two seasons.

"I am so happy to have concluded this operation," Ronaldo said in a video posted by the Cruzeiro president, adding, while holding one of the club's blue shirts, that he wants to "give back to Cruzeiro and take them where they deserve to be."

Ronaldo, who played for Cruzeiro as a teenager in the early 1990s before going on to become one of the most successful centre forwards in footballing history, did the deal with the help of Brazilian investment bank XP. The transaction, which was done through Ronaldo's Tara Sports company and is still subject to what the bank called "a series of conditions," sees the 45-year-old invest 400 million reais (\$70 million) in the Belo Horizonte club, which has spent two years in Brazil's second division.

Ronaldo, who is from Rio de Janeiro, joined Cruzeiro, in Belo Horizonte, making

his professional debut in 1993 aged 16.

He scored 56 goals in 58 matches for the club, which earned him a call-up to the 1994 World Cup in the United States where he collected a winner's medal without playing a single minute.

After the World Cup, Cruzeiro sold Ronaldo to PSV Eindhoven. He went on to shine at Barcelona, Inter Milan, Real Madrid and AC Milan before ending his career at Sao-Paulo based Corinthians in 2011.



A stunning late goal from 19-year-old substitute Nico gave Barcelona three precious points as they beat Eliche 3-2 at the Camp Nou in LaLiga on Saturday. Nico's strike came after the 22-year-old Ferran Jutgla, making his full debut, and the 17-year-old Gavi had earlier given Barca a two-goal lead. After two league games without a win and a humiliating 3-0 loss to Bayern that knocked them out of the Champions League in the group stage for the first time in almost two decades, Barca sealed the much-needed victory to improve one spot in the standings to seventh, two points off the European qualifying places but still 15 points behind league leaders Real Madrid.

PHOTO: TWITTER



Siddikur Rahman tees off in the 11th Summit Professional Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. The 37-year-old golfer, who recently returned to the country following a five-month stay in the USA, returned a card of two-under-par (70) to end the first round tied for second with Mohammad Rasel, four shots off the pace. Mohammad Sayum grabbed the opening-round lead at six-under-par (66).

PHOTO: BPGA

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