

NFL PREPARES FOR FIRST LONDON GAME AT TWICKENHAM STADIUM

LONDON: Twickenham Stadium has seen its share of tackles and tries, field goals and forward passes. The NFL is about to bring some more, but with a twist. A sporting event other than rugby will be held at the venue for the first time in its 107-year history when it hosts a game between the Los Angeles Rams and the New York Giants on Sunday. After playing 15 games over 10 years at Wembley Stadium, the league is slightly broadening its international horizons, moving one of its annual international games to a different London location.

Forget about scrums and say hello to huddles. Keep an eye out for yellow flags, not yellow cards. Even for those who have made the trek to Wembley, Sunday's game will provide a different type of atmosphere. Think of it, in American terms, as Lambeau Field meets Wrigley Field.

"Twickenham is definitely a suburban, residential venue, and so it offers a very different experience for fans," said

Mark Waller, the NFL's executive vice president for international. "I think it's going to be fascinating and interesting for our fans to give us feedback on how that experience will compare to what many of them will already have seen and known at Wembley." To prepare Twickenham for Sunday's game, the NFL and the Rugby Football Union had to make a number of significant changes. For one, with football rosters twice the size of their rugby counterparts, the existing locker rooms will be insufficient. The Rams, the designated home team, will dress in a temporary facility in the Twickenham gym, while the Giants will utilize an adjacent reception hall. The coaching booths, located just above the access tunnels for rugby games, will be moved to the sixth level to provide coaches with an appropriate viewpoint. Those converted suites also will need to be fitted with replay and communications systems - something the NFL and RFU have been working to install.

TRANSPORTATIONS

Accommodations will also be needed for cheerleaders and the media, who will work from three sections in the southwest corner. Because of the stadium's location, a detailed transportation plan is also needed for buses transporting players and team personnel to and from Twickenham.

Some of those changes will be noticeable to longtime Twickenham attendees. In addition to the goal posts, which were installed last Monday, and the field markings, to be painted later this week, the capacity of the stadium will be reduced from 82,000 to 75,000 for NFL games. According to Charlotte Harwood, an RFU spokeswoman, that's because views from the front several rows of the lower bowl rise just above field level and will be obstructed by players and coaches on the sidelines.

The goal, of course, is to make sure that any potential issues have been addressed by Sunday. Those attending

the first games at Wembley - the Giants, coincidentally, played in the first game in London in 2007 - reported a number of hiccups that were ironed out in subsequent years.

Waller said the RFU's experience hosting the semifinals and final of the Rugby World Cup in 2015, has eased a number of concerns about the venue. "It's an important event for them in the same way that it's an important event for us," Waller said. "They're very focused on it being successful as well."

The Rams, who flew through the night after a 31-28 road loss to the Detroit Lions, arrived in London early yesterday. Per the terms of their relocation from St. Louis, they will play at least one home game in London every year until their new stadium opens in 2019.

That game is not guaranteed to always be at Twickenham. The league and the RFU reached an agreement last October to play a minimum of three games in three years at the venue, but

not necessarily one each season.

The NFL also has agreements to play at least two games at Wembley each year through 2020 and will begin playing at least two games a year at the redeveloped White Hart Lane, the home of English Premier League club Tottenham, beginning in 2018.

Thus, how successful Sunday's game is could play a role in the NFL's future at Twickenham. Waller said the league isn't considering games at any other venues in London, and the reason Twickenham and White Hart Lane were contracted is because Wembley hosts a number of other events.

"The most exciting thing for us is the ability for us to get a new experience, a new stadium experience," Waller said. "We're very happy and have always been very happy with Wembley, and so for us, it's never been about looking for something better than Wembley. It's, 'Hey, we need to give our fans the best experience available.'" —AP

UNFASHIONABLE MURRAY LOOKING GOOD FOR WORLD NUMBER ONE

SHANGHAI: Andy Murray has never been the most fashionable member of tennis's 'Big Four', but he finally looks the part as he zeroes in on the world number one spot.

Winning back-to-back titles in China without dropping a set tells its own story, and underlines the consensus that Murray is currently the world's best player. The 29-year-old swept past Roberto Bautista to win his third Shanghai Masters title on Sunday, lifting his sixth trophy in what has been his best season yet. It could get better for Murray, who can overtake Novak Djokovic at the top of the rankings with wins in Vienna and Paris, provided the Serb doesn't reach the Paris final.

It hasn't done Murray any harm that Djokovic has suffered a sudden and perplexing dip in form, and that Roger Federer is sidelined by injury. Rafael Nadal is also a fading force but Murray would be a deserving successor as the last of the four, who have 46 Grand Slam titles between them, to reach number one. What's more, Murray, often marked out for his anguished demeanour on court, is growing into the role of eminent tour-leader in the mould of Djokovic and Federer before him.

The one-time gawky kid still berates himself during matches but he is far more comfortable with the media, giving fulsome and intelligent answers to all questions. He is also prepared to defend and mentor younger players such as the wayward Nick Kyrgios, whose latest on-court meltdown resulted in a fine in Shanghai. Physically, too, Murray is at his peak, with supreme fitness and acceleration that can shift his now-hulking frame around the court at frightening speeds.

TOUGH LOSSES

He has reached three Slam finals this year, winning his second Wimbledon title and also becoming the first man to successfully defend Olympic singles gold.

Murray hired British coach Jamie Delgado this year and Ivan Lendl's return to his team in June was quickly followed by victory at Wimbledon. He hasn't looked back since.

"Winning Wimbledon was really a big boost to my confidence after I had had quite a few tough losses in the Slams the last few years," he said. "That kind of gave me a lot more belief in myself that I could win the major competitions again. It helped motivate me. I have obviously quite a different team this year with Ivan and Jamie. Since the French Open, I've played the best three months of tennis of my career."

Obstacles remain and Murray is wary of a return to form by Djokovic, conservatively predicting that February or March represent his best chance of reaching number one. "I will try and finish this year as strong as I can. And next year if the opportunity is there to reach number one, then I want to try and take it," he said. "But it's not going to be easy because Novak plays great tennis indoors, and also his record at the beginning of the year is phenomenal in Australia and Indian Wells, Miami. It's going to be a tough thing to achieve that. I'm aware of that. I'm close-ish right now, but it's going to be really tough still." It has been some journey for Murray, who survived the 1996 Dunblane school massacre when he was eight and moved to Spain to further his tennis career when he was 15. But if he keeps his current trajectory, it won't be long before he becomes Britain's first world number one under the ATP's computerised rankings, which were introduced in 1973. "I have never had success like I have had the last few months in my career, so to keep that going, I'm aware it's going to be a difficult thing to do," he warned.

"I need to keep myself motivated and be smart with my schedule and my time off, as well. But I believe I can get there. I definitely believe I can get there. These last few months have proved that to me." —AFP



ESTORIL: This file photo taken on May 2, 2015 in Estoril shows Australian Nick Kyrgios celebrating a point over Spanish Pablo Busta during the semi-final Estoril Open Tennis tournament. Wayward tennis star Nick Kyrgios will seek psychological help to avoid an eight week ban ordered by the ATP for a tantrum at the Shanghai Masters, Tennis Australia said yesterday. —AFP

KYRGIOS TO SEEK PSYCHOLOGIST HELP AFTER ATP BAN THREAT

LONDON: Wayward tennis star Nick Kyrgios will seek psychological help to avoid an eight week ban ordered by the ATP for a tantrum at the Shanghai Masters, Tennis Australia said yesterday. The ATP ordered a \$25,000 (22,700 euros) fine and said a three week ban would be increased to eight weeks if the 21-year-old Kyrgios did not seek help for his temper.

The world number 14 gave away points and swore and argued with fans before being booed off court after his 6-3, 6-1 defeat by Mischa Zverev in his second round match last week.

Tennis Australia said in a statement that it would support Kyrgios. "Nick's health and well-being is a priority and the ATP has offered a reduced penalty on the provision that he seeks appropriate professional advice, which he has agreed to do," said a statement by the Australian body. Kyrgios apologised again for his behaviour in Shanghai. "The season has been a long one as I battled several injuries and other challenges towards the end of the summer," he said in a statement. "My body finally just gave out in Shanghai both physically and mentally. This is no excuse, and I know very well that I need to apologise to the fans - in Shanghai and other parts of the world - as well as the tournament organisers in Shanghai who do an amazing job."

Kyrgios said he "regretted how his year was ending." "I do understand and respect the decision by the ATP and I will use this time off to improve on and off the court."

The \$25,000 ATP fine will be added to a \$16,500 penalty ordered last week. The Shanghai outburst was the latest in a long line of incidents involving the Australian. Last year he was given a suspended one-month ban for making comments to Stan Wawrinka about his wife.

"Nick's conduct in Shanghai was unacceptable, disrespectful to the sport and its fans," said ATP executive chairman Chris Kermode. "We take these matters very seriously and he has since apologised for his actions."

"Nick is a phenomenal talent and our hope is that he uses this time away from the tour constructively and, with some support, is able to return to competition with an improved mindset and stronger than ever before." The ATP said that after an investigation into the Australian's second round match in Shanghai, Kyrgios had been found guilty of conduct contrary to the integrity of the game.

This meant an additional fine and an immediate eight week suspension. "However, the suspension will be reduced to three tournament weeks upon agreement that the player enters a plan of care under the direction of a sports psychologist, or an equivalent plan approved by ATP." If Kyrgios agrees to see a psychologist he could return to the tour on November 7, after the three week ban.

As he would have no more tournaments to play, even the three week ban means that Kyrgios's year is effectively over.

"We have spoken to his management and

Nick has agreed to seek the help of a sports psychologist and will now be available to play in the

Hopman Cup in early January," a Tennis Australia spokesperson said. —AFP

SERENA WITHDRAWS FROM WTA FINALS

SINGAPORE: US superstar Serena Williams has withdrawn from the elite WTA Finals in Singapore, saying she's still working to recover from the shoulder troubles that hindered her in 2016. The WTA announced Williams' withdrawal from the event that starts on October 23 on their Twitter feed, posting a video of Williams explaining the decision.

It will be the second straight year that Williams is skipping the season finale in Singapore due to injury. "Hey everyone in Singapore," Williams said. "I'm really, really bummed that I won't be able to come compete this year."

"It's been a really tough year for me just dealing so much with these shoulder injuries. My doctor insists that I stay home and heal it every single day."

The 22-time Grand Slam champion earlier pulled out of two tournaments in China after being knocked out of the semi-finals of the US Open. That defeat saw Williams' 186-week reign atop the world rankings end as Germany's Angelique Kerber reached the sum-

mit and captured the Flushing Meadows title into the bargain.

Williams claimed just one Grand Slam title in 2016, at Wimbledon. After that, shoulder troubles hampered her in Rio where her hopes of a fifth Olympic gold medal were crushed in the third round.

WTA CEO Steve Simon said in a statement that organisers were "as disappointed as the fans". "We wish her a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing her back competing, fit and healthy," he added.

Williams' withdrawal opens up the eighth qualification spot to Britain's Johanna Konta, Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro and Russia's Svetlana Kuznetsova. Either Navarro or Kuznetsova must win the title in Moscow at the VTB Kremlin Cup next week in order to edge out Konta for the eighth and final qualifying spot.

The tournament in Singapore will see reigning champion Agnieszka Radwanska defending her title against current top seed Kerber. —AFP



Serena Williams



SHANGHAI: This file photo taken on October 16, 2016 shows Andy Murray of Britain celebrating after winning his men's singles finals match against Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain at the Shanghai Masters tennis tournament in Shanghai. Andy Murray has never been the most fashionable member of tennis's 'Big Four', but he finally looks the part as he zeroes in on world number one. —AFP

KSSC PREPARES FOR SHOOTING TOURNAMENT

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sports Club (KSSC) completed its preparations to hold HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Shooting Tournament, to start the 2016/2017 season. A large number of shooters of all categories will participate in the tournament including shooters from the National Guard, army and police, beside the club shooters.

The tournament will be held from 20/10/2016 to 22/11 KSSC held refresher courses for 15 shotgun referees and another course for 20 rifle referees in order to review the laws and update them on new developments.

Head of shotgun referees Hamad Al-Ruwaisan expressed thanks to the KSSF Board of Directors for their continued efforts to keep shooting sport at a prime level, besides backing Kuwaiti referees to officiate local and foreign tournaments. He appreciated the large number of shooters of both genders who will participate in HH the Crown Prince tournament including 100 in the shotgun events alone. Meanwhile Deputy Technical Director in the rifle pistol department Abdallah Barakat said he is pleased to have this important tournament at this time of year, and hoped results be as



Adnan Al-Ibrahim

good as they were last year. He said most shooters were getting ready two months earlier and training hard to compete for the top prize.

Member of the board, Assistant Treasure Adnan Al-Ibrahim expressed thanks to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad for patronizing the tournament as it is one of the important events to launch this season.

He said that HH the Crown Prince contributed so much to supporting heritage sports, particularly shooting.

He said the organizing committee held several meetings, and made sure all ranges and equipment are ready, adding that the opening ceremony will be attended by representative of HH the Crown Prince and several dignitaries.