

## SQUASH

## DAVID EAGER TO FOLLOW IN BILLIE JEAN'S FOOTSTEPS

**KINGSTON UPON HULL:** Nicol David, the squash great whose nine-year stint as world number one may never be surpassed, wants to follow the example of women's sports pioneer Billie Jean King when her playing days are done.

Although the 33-year-old Malaysian reached the quarter-finals of the British Open on Thursday and may still challenge for titles, she has been inspired by the tennis legend who led the fight for prize money parity and campaigned for women's rights in a wider way. "I really hope I can do something a little like what she has done for her sport," said David, who spent an hour with the American before the Windy City Open squash tournament in Chicago last month. "She is the power of women's sport. Without her pushing the cause women wouldn't be where they are now," she added, acknowledging King's influence beyond sport.

"She has paved the way in all sports at

various levels and in every field to give their best. Billie Jean fought for a lot of other rights as well. She is very motivating."

David follows King's philosophy that women have to prove they are just as good at entertaining as anyone, and need to believe in themselves that they can make this happen-by envisioning it, dreaming it and working every day towards that dream.

## 'PUSH FOR RECOGNITION'

"Billie Jean asked me what do you see?" David said. "How do you see squash progressing in the future? Where will be a good place to start?" David spoke of her conversation with King during a week in which the British Open is offering women equal prize money for the first time in its 88-year history.

"It just shows that there is a push for recognition we deserve and we are going forward in the right direction.

"I am very honoured and grateful that

Doctor (Assem) Allam (the British Open sponsor, who took the tournament to the northern city of Hull, where he is the owner of Premier League football club Hull) is promoting this cause, and gives us more potential to push this cause, men and women together." Whilst David is not in any way attempting to compare herself with the vastly experienced King, 73, she certainly seems well-placed to promote the cause of women's equality in other areas.

Not only has she become one of Asia's most famous sportswomen, she is already well-known for fund-raising campaigning well beyond sport. She has joined campaigns by UNICEF, the United Nations children's charity, and devoted her time and celebrity to raise funds for many causes, including aid for Japanese tsunami and earthquake victims. Whilst campaigning more diligently than any other squash player for improved prize money for women, David

has spoken with corporate executives, promoters, and organisations around the world.

Right now David feels America is not just where equal prize money for women began, it is where squash can accelerate its take-off, as tennis did. "They have more facilities and ground-work with their policies," she said. "If we approach major corporations and they want parity in what they specialise in, it helps." The US Open became the first squash tournament with equal prize money in 2013, after which the Tournament of Champions in New York and the Windy City Open followed suit. Next year parity is likely to be mandatory at all World Series squash tournaments.

"It's a difficult job to manage both men and women together, so it's a matter of formulating what's needed for the women," said David. "But Billie Jean showed that it's all logical. It's nothing new, but everything makes sense. It's true that we deserve what we are trying to do. We can do it." — AFP

## TOP 14 AIMS TO PUT SPARKLE BACK INTO FRENCH CLUB RUGBY

**PARIS:** A botched Parisian club merger, a strike, rape allegations against three Grenoble players and the federation at apparent war with Top 14 officials. It is fair to say that it has not been the best couple of weeks for French club rugby. Fans and players will attempt to put all that aside for the next round of matches this weekend with particular interest in key games for Racing 92 and Stade Français. A mooted merger between the two clubs, winners of the last two Top 14 titles, was promptly booted into touch. Their owners were forced into a swift backtrack after a deluge of criticism from players, fans, rugby officials and even the Paris city administration.

The proposed merger saw the body running professional rugby in France, the LNR, postpone both Racing and Stade Français' matches last week, against Montpellier and Castres.

It was a decision that will no doubt cause a scheduling nightmare with just five weekends of the regular season remaining before play-offs start on May 20, and European action filling in the rest.

The French Rugby Federation (FFR), now headed by former France coach Bernard Laporte, waded into the row on Wednesday by symbolically cancelling the LNR decision.

The action highlighted wider rifts between the LNR and FFR over federal contracts — 11 of the Top 14 clubs have come out against Laporte's proposal to have a 40-player core on central contracts to try to improve the French national team's performance. As it is, Racing and Stade have two mouthwatering games awaiting them, against Clermont (in Lille) and Toulon respectively. "We're not going to hide it, it's been tough, complicated for everyone," said Racing's Argentine lock Manuel Carizza. "But we knew how to separate the paddock from all the off-the-field stuff. Even last week we trained really well. "That's great because it shows that even if we haven't had an outstanding season thus far, there remains a strong bond between the squad, like last season."

## GRENOBLE IN TURMOIL

While Racing have had problems off the pitch, with ex-All Black lock Ali Williams sacked after being caught in possession of cocaine and flagship signing Dan Carter caught drink driving, they pale into insignificance when compared to Grenoble.

With Irish coach Bernard Jackman shown the door last week after a string of poor results, three players-Irish prop Denis Coulson, Kiwi backrower Rory Grice and French hooker Loick Jammes-remained in custody as of Thursday afternoon as French police investigate a rape allegation. Three other players were released the same day after helping police with their enquiries, including twice-capped former Wallaby lock Peter Kimlin. Grenoble, who sit in 13th place three points ahead of rock-bottom Bayonne and 11 behind Stade Français, responded to their off-field crises with an impressive last-gasp draw with Toulon last weekend. — AP



**DUBLIN:** This file photo taken on February 24 shows England's forwards failing to claim the ball from a line-out during the 6 Nations Rugby union game between Ireland and England at Croke Park stadium, Dublin. — AP

## RUGBY

## CRUSADERS BEAT FORCE 45-17 IN SUPER RUGBY

**CHRISTCHURCH:** The Christchurch, New Zealand-based Crusaders maintained their unbeaten start to the Super Rugby season when they beat the Perth-based Western Force 45-17 yesterday to open the tournament's fifth round. In contrast to their last three matches in which they came from behind to win - after trailing by 18, 21 and 19 points respectively - the Crusaders led throughout Friday's match to win by seven tries to two.

But after leading 28-17 at halftime, the Crusaders struggled to drive home their advantage in the second half and their winning margin was only inflated by two tries in the last 10 minutes.

The Force, who have been competitive but have won only one of their first four matches, put pressure on the

Crusaders, especially at scrums in the early part of the second half. But they were unable to capitalize on a period of intense pressure early in the second spell and the Crusaders were able to re-establish control and post a convincing victory.

Rain late in the match made ball-handling difficult and the game lost most of its structure after halftime. "We can't make the weather an excuse," Crusaders captain Sam Whitelock said. "We've got to trust our ball skills and make better decisions. They came out and really tested us."

The Crusaders took the lead in the match after only five minutes with a try to former Wallabies winger Digby Ioane, converted by flyhalf Mitchell Hunt. After a penalty by Jono Lance for

the Force, the Crusaders extended their lead with a try to All Blacks flanker Matt Todd after another strong run by Ioane.

Todd then made an uncharacteristic error, throwing a pass which was intercepted by Alex Newsome, who ran more than 50 meters to score for the Force, cutting the lead to 14-10.

Hard-working flanker Scott Barrett scored for the Crusaders to make the lead 21-10 and lock Luke Romano plunged on a loose ball over the Force line for a 28-10 lead. The Force hit back with a try before halftime to Chance Peni. Hooker Codie Taylor opened the second half with a try which put the Crusaders ahead 22-17, and late tries to David Havili and Ben Funnell made the margin convincing. — AP