

DJOKOVIC, MURRAY SEEDED FOR WIMBLEDON FINAL SHOWDOWN

LONDON: World number one Novak Djokovic and 17-time major winner Roger Federer get Wimbledon under way yesterday with history beckoning for the two Grand Slam A-listers. Top seed Djokovic is halfway to the first calendar Grand Slam since 1969 after ending his agonising wait for a maiden French Open crown earlier this month.

The 29-year-old defending champion currently holds all four majors and if he wins a third successive Wimbledon title and fourth in all, he will become just the second man in history to win five successive Slams. Only Don Budge, who won six straight from 1937 Wimbledon to the 1938 US Championships, has achieved the feat.

Djokovic is such a hot favourite to triumph on July 10 that women's champion Serena Williams is already tipping the Serb for more greatness. "I think he'll get

it easy," said the American who will begin her bid for an Open era record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam today. Djokovic has won six of the last eight Grand Slams, taking him to a career tally of 12 — within two of Rafael Nadal's mark and five behind Federer's record.

Djokovic takes on British wild card James Ward in the opening match on Centre Court. Ward, the 29-year-old son of a London taxi driver, is ranked at 177 in the world and made the third round last year with Australian coach Darren Tandy. But Tandy was diagnosed with cancer of the colon later in the year and died on Christmas Eve.

"It's been a tough time. Obviously the end of last year was very difficult," Ward told the Press Association. "He was my tennis coach so every time I play tennis it reminds me of him." Federer, whose last major triumph was at Wimbledon in 2012

when he won his seventh title at the All England Club, begins against Argentina's world number 51 Guido Pella.

Federer, 34, has been runner-up to Djokovic for the last two years and is attempting to become the oldest ever Wimbledon champion in modern times. But the Swiss has been dogged by knee and back problems this year and his injury-enforced withdrawal from the French Open ended his streak of 65 successive Grand Slam appearances stretching back to 1999. He has since suffered semi-final losses on grass at Stuttgart and Halle, the last of which against Alexander Zverev was his first against a teenager in 10 years. Federer's failure to win a title in 2016 means he will enter Wimbledon on his longest trophy drought since 2000.

'NOVAK, ANDY THE FAVOURITES'
"Clearly I'm not thinking of the title

right away," said the Swiss when asked to assess his chances.

"Novak or Andy (Murray) are the big favourites." Pella, 26, was forced to retire from his first round match on his Wimbledon debut in 2013 while he fell in qualifying last year. The Centre Court programme also sees women's second seed and French Open champion Garbine Muguruza taking on Camila Giorgi, the world number 68 from Italy.

Muguruza was runner-up to Williams last year. Giorgi reached the fourth round in 2012. On Court One, 36-year-old Venus Williams, seeded eighth and a five-time champion, takes on Croatia's Donna Vekic.

Japanese fifth seed Kei Nishikori, who has yet to get beyond the fourth round, takes on big-serving Australian Sam Groth. Australian Open champion Angelique Kerber faces Britain's Laura Robson in the same arena.

Canadian sixth seed Milos Raonic, with John McEnroe in his corner, meets Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta as he looks to improve on his 2014 semi-final showing.

Meanwhile, armed police will patrol the tournament, both inside and outside the grounds while organisers have also increased the numbers of their private security staff.

Armed officers were also used at Wimbledon last year but on a lower scale on the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 attacks in London. "(There will be) significant numbers of officers patrolling the local area, firearms officers and a highly mobile reserve that can respond to emerging incidents," said a police spokesman. "Officers will be working in uniform and in plain clothes during the event." Rain is also expected in the first week but forecasters are confident showers will pass by the time play gets under way. — AFP

AMIR CAN BE WORLD'S BEST, SAYS MISBAH

SOUTHAMPTON: Mohammad Amir can still become the best bowler in the world despite serving a five-year ban for spot-fixing, Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq said yesterday. Left-arm fast bowler Amir, 24, is expected to make his return to Test cricket next month against England at Lord's, where his exciting career came to a shuddering halt in 2010.

During that year's Test against England at Lord's, Amir and Pakistan new-ball partner Mohammad Asif bowled no-balls to order on the instructions of their captain Salman Butt as part of a sting operation carried out by a tabloid newspaper.

All three received five-year bans from cricket and, together with sports agent Mazhar Majeed, jail terms. Amir, who served three months in an English young offenders

institute, has only played limited overs internationals for Pakistan, but his career could come full circle when the first of a four-Test series against England starts at Lord's, 'the home of cricket', on July 14.

Misbah believes Amir, who was one of the hottest properties in world cricket at the time of his ban, has lost none of his skill. "If you look at his bowling speed, swing and control-it's there," said Misbah at Hampshire's Rose Bowl ground near Southampton, where Pakistan were training Monday. "He can still be the best bowler in the world," he added ahead of Pakistan's opening three-day tour match against Somerset at Taunton starting Sunday.

"Whatever form of the game he has played since his comeback, he has done well," said key batsman Misbah of Amir, who in his 14 Tests before his ban took 51 wickets at an average of under 30 apiece.

"He knows he is under pressure but he is handling it well," the Pakistan captain insisted. "This is a good chance for him to come here, the place where he had those problems, and show the world he is there to perform and deliver for the team. "It is a chance to win back all his fans. It's a great opportunity and he's working hard." As for Amir receiving a potentially hostile reception from English spectators, Misbah said: "It might happen-you can always hear voices. "The best way is to concentrate on your skills and your duties and Amir has to focus on his game and what he has to do. He is doing well."

'MICROSCOPE'

Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur said he had been impressed by Amir's attitude since taking charge of the side just over a month ago. "His training has been excellent, he's fitted back into the team exceptionally well," explained Arthur.

"It's up to me and the coaching staff to make him the best he can possibly be in these conditions," said Arthur, who previously coached Australia after making his name internationally when in charge of his native South Africa. "We all understand he's going to be under the microscope and he realises that too." "The way he's trying to handle that is to let his performances do the talking." This is Pakistan's first full of tour of England since their infamous 2010 visit. Pakistan, however, have won their last two Test series against England, in 2012 and 2015, both of which took place in the United Arab Emirates. England defeated Sri Lanka 2-0 in a three-Test series that concluded with a rain-marred draw at Lord's earlier this month. But Arthur said he took heart from the vulnerability of England's top order. "I do (see weak links) in the top order. Alastair Cook and Joe Root play such a vital role in that set-up. "I know Jonny Bairstow has played exceptionally well against Sri Lanka but we don't know who will replace Nick Compton and James Vince is still trying to find his way.

"If we can put their top-order batting under real pressure, we also have a world-class leg-spinner in Yasir Shah. "So whenever we bowl, there will be no easy period for batsmen." — AFP



BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS: Australian cricketers pose with their winning trophy at the end of the final match of the Tri-nation Series between Australia and West Indies in Bridgetown on June 26, 2016.

MARSH POWERS AUSSIES TO TRI-NATION VICTORY

BRIDGETOWN: Mitchell Marsh emerged as the unlikely bowling hero for Australia as the World Cup-holders defeated the West Indies by 58 runs in the final of the Tri-Nation One-Day International Series.

Set a challenging target of 271 after wicket-keeper Matthew Wade's unbeaten 57 led an Australian lower-order revival from 173 for six to a final total of 270 for nine off 50 overs, Marsh claimed the prized wickets of Darren Bravo and Marlon Samuels, adding the scalp of opening batsman Johnson Charles for good measure to effectively short-circuit the home side's pursuit. His disciplined medium-pacers realised miserly figures of three for 32 with the West Indies unable to recapture the impressive batting form of earlier matches in being dismissed for 212 off 45.4 overs at Kensington Oval in Barbados on Sunday. Josh Hazlewood polished off the tail to finish with the best figures of five for 50, but it was Marsh's spell that made the difference when it mattered most. "We really fought well tonight and I always felt we could defend that total," said victorious captain Steve Smith. "It's just the way we play. We believe in ourselves and go hard at the opposition every time." Charles topscored with 45 and featured in an encouraging opening partnership of 49 with Andre Fletcher.

They weathered the early assault from Mitchell Starc but it was fellow new ball bowler Hazlewood who prised out Fletcher in the 11th over of the innings. Marsh, adjudged Man of the Match, then cemented Australia's control of the match when he had Bravo caught behind, Samuels taken at short extra-cover and Charles leg-before within the space of ten runs. At 72 for four and with the top batsmen gone, West Indies' chances of victory had lurched into improbability, especially when leg-spinner Adam Zampa lured the big-hitting Kieron Pollard into hoisting a catch to long-off. Like his Australian counterpart, Denesh Ramdin attempted to engineer a recovery. His captain, Jason Holder, dominated a 43-run stand in contributing 34 before falling to Nathan Coulter-Nile.

EXCITEMENT

A couple big hits by Carlos Brathwaite then generated some excitement before he was bowled by Hazlewood and from that point on, the favourites closed out the match, Ramdin being eighth out for 40.

Hazlewood took the Man of the Series honours. Ironically, it was Marsh's dismissal to spinner Sulleman Benn in the 37th over that raised Caribbean hopes of upsetting the five-time World Cup-winners who were then in danger of being dismissed for under 200 and confounding Steve Smith's decision to bat first. Yet Wade somehow managed to survive against his nemesis, mystery spinner Sunil Narine, and prospered against the seamers, crashing three sixes to complete a recovery that saw 97 runs added over the last 13 overs. West Indies were hampered by the absence of Shannon Gabriel at the end of the innings with the tearaway fast bowler leaving the field after completing seven overs.

"We missed having Shannon available at the end of the innings," Holder observed. "I felt he was our best chance of knocking off their lower order." His first four overs had proved expensive but Gabriel returned midway through the

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of play in the Triangular Series match between Australia and West Indies on Sunday in Bridgetown, Barbados.

Australia Innings		West Indies Innings	
U. Khawaja c Ramdin b Holder	14	A. Fletcher c Smith b Hazlewood	9
A. Finch c Samuels b Pollard	47	Da. Bravo c Wade b M. Marsh	45
S. Smith c Samuels b Gabriel	46	M. Samuels c Bailey b M. Marsh	6
G. Bailey b C. Brathwaite	22	M. Marsh b Benn	40
M. Marsh b Benn	32	K. Pollard c Hazlewood b Zampa	20
G. Maxwell lbw b Gabriel	4	J. Holder c Finch b Coulter-Nile	34
M. Wade not out	57	C. Brathwaite b Hazlewood	14
M. Starc st Ramdin b Narine	17	S. Narine c Smith b Hazlewood	23
N. Coulter-Nile c Da. Bravo b Holder	15	S. Benn c Maxwell b Hazlewood	2
A. Zampa run out (C. Brathwaite)	5	S. Gabriel not out	1
J. Hazlewood not out	0	Extras (lb-2 nb-1 w-9)	12
Extras (b-1 lb-2 w-8)	11	Total (all out, 45.4 overs)	212
Total (for 9 wickets, 50 overs)	270	Fall of wickets: 1-28 U. Khawaja, 2-69 A. Finch, 3-120 G. Bailey, 4-152 S. Smith, 5-156 G. Maxwell, 6-173 M. Marsh, 7-211 M. Starc, 8-238 N. Coulter-Nile, 9-264 A. Zampa.	
		Bowling: J. Holder 10-1-51-2 (w-2), S. Gabriel 7-0-58-2 (w-1), C. Brathwaite 8-2-32-1, K. Pollard 5-0-33-1 (w-1), S. Narine 10-1-55-1 (w-3), S. Benn 10-0-38-1 (w-1).	

innings to account for Smith (46) and the dangerous Glenn Maxwell in the same over.

Aaron Finch led the charge at Gabriel with a robust knock of 47, his highest ODI score against the West Indies. He looked set for a big innings when a miscued heave off Pollard offered

Samuels a simple catch on the square-leg boundary. Holder returned in the midst of the lower-order rally to snare Coulter-Nile, however

the captain appeared to have miscalculated his bowling options in only allowing Brathwaite eight of a possible ten overs. — AFP



BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS: West Indies cricketer Johnson Charles plays a shot during the final match of the Tri-nation Series between Australia and West Indies in Bridgetown on June 26, 2016.



LONDON: This file photo taken on August 27, 2010 shows Pakistan's Mohammad Amir bowling on the second day of the fourth NPower Test cricket match between England and Pakistan at Lord's Cricket Ground in London, England. — AFP

AUSTRALIA NEED TO WORK ON LOT OF AREAS, SAYS CAPTAIN SMITH

BARBADOS: Australia, the world's top-ranked one-day-international side, need to work on a number of aspects to improve ahead of next year's Champions Trophy, captain Steve Smith said after they won a triangular series win in the West Indies.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh's bowling and wicketkeeper Matthew Wade's lower middle order batting powered Australia to a 58-run win against hosts West Indies in the final of the tournament, which also included South Africa.

"I was pleased with the way we scrapped today," Smith told reporters after the victory in Barbados. "I am using that word a lot. But that's been bit of a theme in this series with the kind of wickets we have been playing on.

"I am pleased we were able to get the job done." The Champions Trophy, featuring the top eight teams in the world, will be held next June in England and Wales where Australia have been grouped with the hosts, New Zealand and Bangladesh.

In Sunday's final, West Indies made a brisk start in their chase of 271 with a 49-

run opening stand between Johnson Charles and Andre Fletcher before Australia wrested back control and Smith said his bowlers need to start better with the new ball.

"We have to continue to start well with the ball," the 27-year-old said. "In the last probably three of four series we have been up against some pretty dynamic opening batters. They have got the better of us at the start.

"We have been lucky enough to pull it back in the middle overs and bowl pretty well at the death. We will make things a lot easier for ourselves if we start really well, hit good areas and execute our plans." Smith was confident that Australia's young team will only get better as they play more together.

"We still got a lot of areas to work on ... our fielding still needs a lot of work. We need to have the energy we had today in every game," he said.

"Hopefully as this group continues to play more together we will continue to learn each other's games and continue to get well as a team." — Reuters