

Proteas hoping to put pressure on batting line-up

Australia's fearsome attack creates dilemma for South Africa

DURBAN, South Africa, Feb 27, (AFP): Some of the world's best fast bowlers will square up when the first Test between South Africa and Australia starts at Kingsmead on Thursday.

They may find, however, that some of their sting drawn by pitch conditions.

Kingsmead has lost the reputation it once had as a fast bowler's paradise. It has been many years since wicketkeepers had to leap around as balls soared and sped off the playing surface.

Indications are that the pitch will offer encouragement but not excessive help to the fast men, with enough grass on the surface to assist movement off the seam.

The South African team, it seems, has given up on trying to influence conditions after their "requests" to

finger he broke four weeks ago remained bandaged and he took a minimal part in the team's first practice in Durban on Monday.

Wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock, was woefully out of form with the bat before being injured in a one-day series against India, opening the door for Heinrich Klaasen to take over the gloves and play some crucial innings.

Both Klaasen and De Kock have been named in a 15-man squad for the first two tests.

South Africa's batsmen will face a fast bowling attack of Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, backed by the off-spin of Nathan Lyon - rated by



Warner

former Australian captain Steve Waugh as the best in the world. Australia's batting has relied greatly in recent times on captain Steve Smith and opener David Warner, so South Africa will be hoping to get through their two stars and put pressure on the rest of the batting line-up with a bowling attack spearheaded by Morne Morkel, Vernon Philander and Kagiso Rabada.

Teams:
South Africa (from): Faf du Plessis (captain), Dean Elgar, Aiden Markram, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers, Quinton de Kock (wkt), Vernon Philander, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Morne Morkel, Lungi Ngidi, Temba Bavuma, Theunis de Bruyn, Wiaan Mulder, Heinrich Klaasen (wkt).

Australia (likely): Steve Smith (captain), David Warner, Cameron Bancroft, Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Mitchell Marsh, Tim Paine (wkt), Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood.

Umpires: Kumar Dharmasena (SRI), Sunderam Ravi (IND), TV umpire: Chris Gaffaney (NZL). Match referee: Jeff Crowe (NZL).

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groundsmen resulted in pitches that were less than ideal for a recent three-Test series against India. The surface for the third Test at the Wanderers was condemned as poor by International Cricket Council match referee Andy Pycroft.

"Everybody knows what happened at the Wanderers, so we've left the groundsmen to prepare the best possible pitches that they can," coach Ottis Gibson said last week.

Assuming the conditions are fair, it should be a red-blooded battle between the teams ranked second and third in Test cricket behind India.

Both have potent fast bowlers and exciting, if fragile, batting line-ups.

South Africa won the first two Tests against India with a four-man pace attack, left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj and just six top-quality batsmen. But may be tempted to strengthen their batting at the expense of one of the specialist bowlers.

That decision may be influenced by a lack of form of key players as well as injuries which kept several out of action in recent weeks.

Captain Faf du Plessis is expected to play, although the right index



In this file photo dated July 28, 2017, South Africa's Morne Morkel celebrates taking the wicket of England's Moeen Ali for LBW on the second day of the third Test match between England and South Africa at The Oval cricket ground in London. (AP)

Generational battle

British great Hoy tips Kennys to win world track 'medals'

APELDOORN, Netherlands, Feb 27, (AFP): Husband and wife Olympic cycling champions Jason and Laura Kenny will make their return to international competition at the World Track Cycling Championships this week and former British cyclist Chris Hoy believes they can win medals.

After winning five Olympic gold medals between them in Rio in 2016, the couple got married and took 2017 off to start a family.

And Hoy, whose British record of six Olympic gold medals Jason Kenny matched with a triple victory in Brazil, told AFP that while they won't dominate as before, they are both capable of going home from Apeldoorn in the Netherlands with something tangible.

"I think Jason will medal in the team sprint, although they (British) are not by any stretch of the imagination assured to medal, so if they get a bronze it will be a great result," Hoy told AFP from Monaco, where he was attending the Laureus Awards.

"Jason has kept ticking it over and was still riding his bike but wasn't riding flat out.

"He just seems to have come back with rejuvenated enthusiasm for his sport and that is the perfect way to do it. If he had kept racing, I think he would have definitely chucked it in."

Kenny won three gold medals — in the individual sprint, team sprint and keirin — at both the 2012 and 2016 Games.

His wife, then racing under the name Laura Trott, won two gold medals at both of those Games — in the omnium and team pursuit.

While Kenny, who is part of the men's sprint team, is an out-and-out sprinter, his wife is an endurance athlete and has been picked in the team pursuit squad.

But Hoy said she is far from guaranteed to be picked for the actual

competition. "She's good enough to be in the team (and) the team is always good enough to win," said Hoy, a Laureus Academy member.

"She has always delivered for the team through thick and thin in the last few years. If she makes the team, they could win it.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see both (Kennys) with medals after next weekend."

Britain have dominated track cycling at the last three Olympics, winning more than half the gold medals on offer at each.

But they rarely prove so all-conquering at the world championships.

Three years ago in France, they failed to win a single gold medal,

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while last year they managed only two.

Hoy believes Katie Archibald, an Olympic gold medalist alongside Laura Kenny in the team pursuit in Rio, will ensure Britain come home with some gold medals.

"Katie Archibald will be a standout performer, the women's endurance team will be standout performers," he said.

"I think it will be a consistent performance (from Britain), it won't be exceptional and they won't dominate, but they will be in the three top teams."

The worlds are set to produce a battle of the generations and the host nation has high hopes of success.

In the men's keirin, 25-year-old Dutchman Matthijs Buchli will try to go one better than the silver he won in Rio, although French veteran Francois Pervis, 33, is aiming for a third world title in the discipline.

"Of course I'm dreaming of shining at home but there's ferocious competition," said Buchli, a winner of three World Cup events this year.

For traditional powerhouses France, much is expected of 20-year Sebastian Vigier, one of the favourites for individual sprint gold.

Al-Mutawa, Seidrawi and Al-Tabtabaei victorious

Al-Khorafi dominates main Barrier Jumping competition

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 27: Kuwait Hunting and Equestrian Club's Jockey Ali Al-Khorafi won the main 130-cm height trophy in the First National Days Barrier Jumping competitions held at the Hunting and Equestrian Club jumping track to mark the 57th Independence and 27th Liberation Days of the country.

Al-Khorafi was followed by Ghazi Al-Juraiwi, Rakan Al-Hasawi and Bafil Forenco in that order, while female horse rider Yara Al-Hunaidi occupied the fifth and sixth places.

Chairman of the International Competition Referees from United Arab Emirates Khalil Ibrahim crowned the winners.

Lady jockey at Kuwait Hunting and Equestrian Club Jamilah

EQUESTRIAN

Al-Mutawa came first in the 120-cm height jumping and excelled over Bafil Forenco and Ali Al-Khorafi. The trophies were presented to the champions by international track designer from UAE Yousef Al-Mahmoudi.

In the 110-cm height competition, Jockey Murbet Al-Seidrawi edged past Monic Van Hurst, Abdullah Al-Awadhi and Bader Al-Haifi. They were crowned by referees Dr Martha Thompson and Nada Al-Awadhi.

The 100 cm height ended in favor of Al-Messila Club's Jockey Ahmad Al-Tabtabaei, followed by Meshari Al-Shatti and Hala Al-Mulla. Referee Muhammad Al-Bahar presented trophies to the winners.



Top & above: Action shots taken during the first National Days Barrier Jumping competition.

Pouille arrives late but starts fast in Dubai Championships

Gavrilova, Tsurenko advance in Mexican Open

DUBAI, Feb 27, (Agencies): Second seed Lucas Pouille had no trouble with the transition to outdoor hardcourt as he beat qualifier Ernests Gulbis 6-4, 6-4 on Tuesday at the Dubai Championships.

The Frenchman, a finalist indoors in Marseille on Sunday, wasted no time in acclimatizing as he beat his Latvian opponent in 79 minutes.

Pouille said he never questioned his decision to play Dubai: "I really

wanted to come back because last year I had good feelings.

"I was playing well. I wanted to come and try to go as far as possible. I knew it would be tough. I know it's going to be tough tomorrow, as well. I'll try to give my best and go as far as possible."

Pouille's compatriot Richard Gasquet was hampered by a knee problem as he lost to Croatian Borna Coric 6-4, 6-3 earlier on Tuesday.

Coric, who beat Andy Murray here in the quarter-finals three years ago,

will next face a third Frenchman, Benoit Paire, who beat Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka on Monday.

Gasquet made the effort but was unable to get the win.

Pierre-Hugues Herbert scored a French victory as he put out Joao Sousa of Portugal 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8).

German Jan-Lennard Struff advanced to the second round beating Andreas Haider-Maurer of Austria 6-2, 6-4. Serb seventh seed Filip Krajinovic beat Italy's Thomas Fabbiano 0-6, 6-2, 6-2.

Meanwhile, Australian wild card Daria Gavrilova and Ukrainian Lesia Tsurenko advanced to the second round of the Mexican Open in Acapulco on Monday, after eliminating unseeded Americans Madison Brengle and Lauren Davis, respectively.

Gavrilova, the third seed, rallied to beat Brengle in three sets, 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, in two hours and 21 minutes.

Gavrilova won despite making 11 double

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faults compared to just three for Brengle. Gavrilova won 66 percent of her first serve points but had her serve broken five times.

The defending champion and seventh seed Tsurenko defeated Davis 6-4, 6-1 in 77 minutes.

On the men's side of the joint WTA and ATP tournament, David Ferrer of Spain breezed past Russia's Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-3 in a night match to reach the second round.

The unseeded Ferrer won 78 percent of his first-serve points and broke Rublev's serve four times in the 83 minute contest.

Ferrer next faces the winner of a match between sixth seeded Juan Martin Del Potro and Mischa Zverev of Germany. In other first round matches, Ryan Harrison edged fellow American John Isner 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

Also:

SAO PAULO: Two Argentinians who are among the top seeds at the Brasil Open have advanced to the next round.

Eighth seed **Federico Delbonis** beat Spain's **Roberto Carballes Baena** 6-4, 6-4 on Monday.

Delbonis' compatriot **Leonardo Mayer**, the clay tournament's fifth seed, outlasted Portugal's **Gastao Elias** 7-5, 6-7 (10), 7-6 (5).

In another Portugal-vs.-Argentina matchup, **Joao Domingues** overcame **Renzo Olivo** 2-6, 7-6 (6), 7-5.

Spain's **Guillermo Garcia-Lopez** advanced with a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 win over **Gerald Melzer** of Austria.



France's Lucas Pouille returns the ball to Karen Khachanov of Russia (unseen) during their Dubai Duty Free Tennis singles match on Feb 27. (AFP)

Khan set to lead Afghanistan

Holder delighted Gayle playing in WC

HARARE, Feb 27, (AFP): West Indies captain Jason Holder on Monday praised star batsmen Chris Gayle and Marlon Samuels for making themselves available for the upcoming 2019 World Cup qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe.

The two-time World Cup winners failed to automatically reach next year's tournament in England and Wales after slipping outside the top eight in the world one-day international rankings,

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leaving them to fight it out with cricket's lesser names for one of the last two spots.

The 26-year-old Holder has experienced pair Gayle and Samuels at his disposal, despite the decisions of other key players Darren Bravo, Sunil Narine, Andre Russell and Kieron Pollard to skip the qualifiers to play in the lucrative Pakistan T20 Super League.

The Caribbean outfit, who won the first two World Cup tournaments in 1975 and 1979, also face Papua New Guinea, Netherlands and Ire-

land in the group stage, with the top three sides to progress to the Super Six.

Holder, though, already has one eye on lifting the title next year and becoming only the second three-time world champions.

Teenage leg-spin sensation Rashid Khan is set to lead Afghanistan for at least the early part of their campaign after usual captain Asghar Stanikzai underwent emergency surgery to have his appendix removed on Monday.

The 19-year-old Khan, who was bought for \$1.41 million (1.15m euros) by Sunrisers Hyderabad in last month's IPL auction, is the world number one bowler in ODIs and closing in on becoming the fastest-ever to reach 100 wickets. Afghanistan's 4-1 series victory over Zimbabwe earlier this month sees them as favourites to qualify alongside West Indies.

Afghanistan open their campaign against Scotland in Bulawayo on Sunday, ahead of further Group B matches with Nepal, Hong Kong and Zimbabwe.

The tournament runs from March 4-25, with the two qualifiers to be decided by the end of the Super Six round on March 23.